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## KANSAS IRISH

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# KANSAS IRISH



*by*

Charles B. Driscoll



*New York*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1943

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First Printing.

In all humility and appreciation  
I dedicate this book  
To three who appear in its pages:

MARIE

(May, Manie-gaarl, Mary)  
whose sisterly devotion has so often sustained me;

MARGARET

(Maggie, Maggie-gaarl, Marguerite)  
whose common sense and good-nature have cleared away fogs and  
darkness;  
and

VAN

(Florence, Bill, Judelizer, F. W.)  
whose phenomenal memory has been of great assistance to me in  
recalling many incidents herein related.

CHARLES B. DRISCOLL  
*New York, 1943.*



## KANSAS IRISH





## 11

THE blazing mid-August sun sank reluctantly to the horizon, abating nothing of its cruel heat until the last arc of its red rim had disappeared. In the motionless cottonwood trees the locusts sawed away at their infernal heat song. A whirlwind, sinister phenomenon of the hot plains region, came drunkenly across the patch of newly cleared land. It made directly for the big man with the corn-knife who was chopping away at the brush and weeds.

Big Flurry, pausing in his work, gazed with astonishment at the approaching swirl of wind and dust. As he opened his mouth to curse it, he was struck in the face by a cloud of dirt and debris.

"Blast you, can't you let me be?" he howled.

He slashed wildly, in terrible temper, with his three-foot knife, at the malevolent whirlwind. "I haven't enough thrubble but you must be filling me dhry throat with dirt!" he wailed.

The whirlwind passed in a few seconds, lifted into the air, and ceased to be. The cloud of dust and trash it had been carrying settled slowly over the landscape.

Big Flurry's broad-brimmed black hat had gone away with the wind. He plodded after it. He retrieved it from the top of a tall sunflower by slashing the trunk of the tree-sized weed.

He returned to the small clearing, wiping the dust out of his eyes. He looked about at the result of his first day's work on his new farm.

In loneliness he had formed the habit of talking aloud to himself, or to inanimate objects. He faced the setting sun, removed his hat, and said aloud, "Well, here, in the Name of God, I'll build our home."

For a few minutes he gave himself up to reverie. He viewed the small patch he had cleared with such tremendous labor, and was struck by the Herculean tasks still to be accomplished. He was oppressed by longing for his absent family, and by the strange, stern face of this new country.

The whirlwind was a mere annoyance, but, coming at the end of the hot day and in a time of depressed spirits, it upset the big Irishman's equilibrium. He sat down upon the hot ground and burst into loud and turbulent weeping.

It was no baby-cry that this giant of a man indulged in. He roared as he wept, interpolating into his bawling a lot of disconnected complaints against Providence. He finished, sobbing loudly, and crying to the buzzing locusts, "I wisht I was in hell!"

Big Flurry was 47 years old when, in the hot, dry summer of 1883, he cleared the spot where he was to make his second attempt to establish a Kansas farm home. He was six feet, three and a half inches tall, broad of shoulder, heavily muscled, big-boned, a giant who had known hard labor all his life and loved it.

He had the thin, white skin and blue eyes of the West Cork Irish, with long, curly, dark brown hair, and a chin whisker that was more red than brown. A strong, prominent nose, high cheek-bones, heavy eyebrows and high forehead combined to give this bewildered immigrant a commanding appearance. He looked so much like Abraham Lincoln that it was difficult to distinguish one from the other, in photographs. The difference was in the set of jaw. Lincoln's mouth, only partly disguised by his beard, implied a certain humorous tolerance. Big Flurry's mouth was set in a line that gave the impression of stern resolution. That one expression, which may have been due to dental formation, made of him, in portraiture, a sterner and more forceful Lincoln.

He was Florence Driscoll, born of fishing and seafaring folk on Long Island, in the Bay of Roaring Water, near Cape Clear, in County Cork, Ireland. Florence is a traditional male name in the Clan O'Driscoll. In Gaelic it is Fineen. In the days of Queen Elizabeth, one of the clan was knighted, Sir Fineen O'Driscoll the Rover. He was a gallant pirate, preying upon English shipping.

But when he was knighted by the English queen, his people disowned him. You do not talk about him among the Driscolls of County Cork.

The O'Driscolls dropped the O, sign of nobility, when their eleven castles were knocked down by the English invader and they were made servants of the oppressors. A few, rising with the new prosperity and proud of the new independence of their country, have taken back the O. All of the tribe that live in and about the Bay of Roaring Water are merely Driscolls, praying God night and day for strength to be worthy of even so modest a name.

Big Con Driscoll was well along in life when there was born to his hard-working spouse the son who was baptized Florence at the parish church in Schull. Florence was the second of fourteen brothers and sisters.

Father John Barry baptized this second child of Cornelius and Mary (Brown) Driscoll, and probably got a mess of fish for his honorarium. The Driscolls had plenty of fish, but never a shilling to spare. The date was December 9, 1836.

Florence becomes Florry early in life, but the Irish pronounce it Flurry. As this Flurry grew older, he became Big Flurry, to distinguish him from Red Flurry, Black Flurry, Little Flurry and Mad Flurry. Big Flurry he remained, all his life, to his Irish friends.

Long Island is as inconspicuous a bit of soil as there is in all Ireland. It lies four miles off the little fishing town of Schull. Rowboats are the means of communication with the mainland. One hundred forty-five people lived on the island in three small villages, when I visited there, a few years ago. The present houses are of concrete, with slate roofs and dirt floors, built by the Irish government after the English army was driven out and the Free State established. They superseded the thatched houses in which the Driscolls had been born and reared through the period of English domination, lasting approximately 750 years.

Big Flurry grew up in the crowded thatched hut of his fathers, learned to catch fish, to build and sail a boat, to handle cordage and face the storms. He was a powerful lad, and took no back talk from anybody.

Big Con was not an easy master. All the children had to work hard to earn their fish and potatoes. Con's phenomenal strength, prodigious labors and strict discipline are still tradition on the island. When he died at the age of 104, most of his children were in America. But Big Con, they say, might have been living yet had he not got wet in a rainstorm and caught pneumonia while out after a boatload of fish.

Flurry was the only son of the Old Man ever to show signs of revolt against the established order. He was past twenty, and one of the best sailors on the island, when he asked his father for a shilling.

"A shilling, it is, arrugh? And glory and honor be to Almighty God, what in the name of Our Blessed Lady would you be doing with a shilling, I don't know?"

"There's a fair at Clonakilty," responded the wayward son, and with unheard-of audacity added, "'Tis meself has worked hard enough these years, allay. A shilling wouldn't be too much, and me wanting to see the fine cattle at the fair."

Himself, as the head of the house is called among the Irish, flew into a powerful rage. His bellowing attracted attention in Middle Village, half a mile away.

"Cows you want to see, is it, me bye-o? God forgive me that I should raise a son that would spend me money on the heifers at the Clonakilty fair! Women, the curse of mankind! That I may die before night and without the priest if ever I give you a shilling to spend on the gaarls at Clonakilty! Get to work now, and mend them nets, before I give you a clout on the side of the head!"

Flurry missed the fair that year. But his resentment was bitter, and out of it grew a determination. He would not spend his life working for this tyrannical father, getting nothing for his labor but the cast-off clothing of his older brother, enough food to support life, and unlimited lecturing on how one should work harder in order to gain eternal happiness.

The day Big Con refused the shilling for the fair, Flurry determined to go to America and live like a man.

He began catching fish for himself at night, after rendering to

the Old Man a full day's work. He took time out to row to the mainland to peddle his catch. It wasn't easy to sell fish in Schull, where every third family was in the fishing trade.

The young man walked to Ballydehob, five miles away, and cried his fish. Sometimes he went almost to Skibbereen, 30 miles from Schull, before he disposed of his catch. Barefooted, tired, but determined, he retraced his path and hid his pennies under the old stone by the landing, on the home island.

Big Con knew what was going on. He made no attempt to interfere or to dissuade the young man from his purpose. Sure, wouldn't it be a fine thing, God willing, if the splapheen should get himself to America? Maybe then he could earn enough money to take some of the others over, that they mightn't be swallowing the anchor here in poor, tax-ridden, conquered Ireland, the rest of their lives.

It took years, but the time came when Flurry had six dollars in American money. He would wait no longer. He had been talking, after Mass on Sundays, to the boys who knew boys who had gone to America. He knew just how it could be done.

To his sister Kate he had told his intentions. As for the others, they could guess. They could think what they liked. There was no talk, but the whole family knew that Flurry was set on going to America.

On a Saturday night, Kate had the word. "I'm best be on me way," was all the restless young man said. Kate did his few personal belongings up in a neat bundle.

"You should have shoes, I suppose," she said.

"Shoes, is it? Faith, 'tis little use I'll have for them until I get to America. Even the harses wears shoes there, Mike Mahoney was telling me."

"'Tis a long journey, Flurry."

"Aye."

Next morning, before daylight, the Driscoll fleet of rowboats was off for early Mass at Schull. After Mass, Flurry went down to the waterside and picked up his bundle. To John, the eldest brother, he said, "Don't that ye do be waiting for me this morning. I'll not be going back to the island."

"Aye," said John, in an even tone, as if he were hearing that the boat needed a new rowlock. "What then?"

"I'm best be on me way to America," answered Big Flurry, shouldering his pack.

"Aye, so. God go along with you on the long road," said John quietly.

Big Flurry, glancing over his shoulder at the rising sun to catch the time of day, was off, on the road to Cork, to America, to the life of freedom.



*Mostly, I heard the story of Big Flurry's boyhood and of his early years in America from his own lips, in his old age, when he was softened by time, gentled by the winds of God.*

*But sometimes in childhood I heard the Old Man telling of his stern father, his hard boyhood, and his struggle in America. That would be when he had a crony as guest. Someone who could understand.*

*Very early in life I observed that the Head of the House did not discuss his personal affairs with members of the family. It was plain, even to me, that he was convinced that they would never understand.*

*The boyhood by the cruel sea appealed to something in my imagination. I longed to hear more of it.*

*But one did not ask personal questions of Dad. Nobody did. Even if you asked him where he was going, when he had a saddled horse ready and his Prince Albert coat on, he would reply, "I'm going over to the Schoolhouse," or "I'm going to see Samuel Brooks."*

*We knew that he had never gone to the Schoolhouse, and never would go. And we knew there was no such person as Samuel Brooks.*

*So we learned not to ask questions.*

*In mature years, lured by my interest in what I had heard in childhood, I visited Big Flurry's birthplace, and there verified many of the stories I had heard from him.*



## 2

It was sixty miles to Cork, and the road was not easy on bare feet that were accustomed to soft sands and the decks of ships. But the folk along the way were kind, neighborly, and always interested in a young man who was on his way to America.

When he met a farmer tending his pigs beside the road, the raw-boned lad pulled off his hat and said, "Good day to you."

"Good day to you, Sor!" responded the farmer, also removing his hat.

"'Tis a fine day," said Flurry.

"It is, thank God."

This customary ritual having been performed, there was talk. Nearly always the farmer and his wife invited the young wayfarer in for a glass of milk, or for a more substantial meal. Always, they had messages to send to sons, brothers, nephews or neighbors, long since gone to the land of promise.

Thousands of young men had gone; other thousands, like Big Flurry, were saving pennies or waiting for money from New York to pay passage. Each family that entertained the latest wayfarer felt that it was establishing a new bond with the New World.

"They do be telling me there are Irish scholars in America," said Pat Casey.

"Aye, like as not."

"Then maybe you could send us word how you fare, and about our son in Ohio, when you're there a while. A scholar will write the letter for you, in the Name of God."

"Aye. I wisht I had learned to read and write meself, as them in America do for the most part, I've been hearing."

And away went the tall fellow, long strides taking him nearer to his goal at a heartening rate.

He slept that night on the floor of a cottage outside Cork, and was in the town early enough to attend the week-day Mass, which he thought might be his last in Ireland.

A sailor ashore beside the river Liffey told the lad from West Cork that there was a ship loading down at Cobh, and foremast hands were needed. Cobh is the deep-water harbor outside Cork. It was called Queenstown by the English, but the natives always called it by its ancient name, pronounced Cove. When they won their freedom, many years later, the English name was wholly discarded, and the port is now officially Cobh.

Before noon that day, Big Flurry was swabbing decks and helping with the loading. Here he was at home. He was as proud of the stout masts and fine lines of the great full-rigger as though she were his own.

All would be well now. He had his six dollars still, for nobody charged anything for the hospitality he had enjoyed along the road. Eagerly he asked questions about America of the sailors who had made the voyage many times. Yes, they said, America was a great country, and they all hoped to settle down there some day. But, they warned, it was not true, as one heard in the pubs in Ireland, that gold money was to be had for picking it up in the streets. Flurry said he never had believed that kind of talk anyway, so there was no disappointment in that news for him.

Big Flurry commanded the respect of the veteran foremast hands. He swarmed up a rope, rove a line, and scampered through the ratlines as rapidly and with as much skill as any of them.

Captain Sheppard, in command of the ship, was a tough old sea-dog. He had no patience with slack work. All had to be kept ship-shape and Bristol fashion at all times, come storm, come calm. If the Captain found a rope improperly coiled or a marlin-spike out of place, he shouted, cursed, and danced a sort of jig of rage.

In future years, Big Flurry was often to imitate the Captain, cursing his hired men for shiftless work or careless handling of

cordage. He would curse with special curses, calling on God to strike him dead if he ever had seen such a slob, and wishing upon the grave of Dan'l O'Connell that the worthless hireling might die without the priest.

"Sure," he would finish, "'tis enough to make a man dancing mad, same as Captain Sheppard."

There was among the foremast hands who were working their passage a pink-cheeked lad with high, piping voice, named Alexander Burke, called Alec. He was undersized and light in weight. Big Flurry often lent a hand to pull Alec through some tough task, and the two became great friends.

Alec was spry, clever, egotistical and self-confident. He could read and write English with a fair degree of accuracy. He gave his friend advice, in return for the help he had had on the voyage. The two went ashore together at Castle Garden in New York, and while they waited their turn for the customary examination of immigrants, Alec offered his first New World doctrine to his friend:

"'Tis not in the bogs we are now at all, Flurry, and we best be getting out to pick up some of this money we hear so much about. It's off to the Lakes I'm going at once. Sure, they pay a dollar a day there for shoveling coal on the docks. I'm going to get rich, Flurry, and you best do the same."

Big Flurry remembered that his uncle, John Brown, lived on a farm near Rochester, New York. Accepting the advice of some of the boys at a sailors' boarding house, he slipped into a snug spot between two freight cars. So, he reached Rochester.

The next day he was a hand on Uncle John's farm. There seemed to be plenty of everything, including work.

The hours were long, but the Irish boy had known long hours. The work was hard and the master stern, but the immigrant boy was learning about farming in America. As he weeded and hoed, he learned to love the soil. It smelled unlike the sea, but there was in it an aroma of promise that the salt water had never had. Yes, he would renounce the sea, and become a farmer—some day.

Not much of a chance of acquiring a farm, or even a suit of

clothes, turned up at the Brown farm. Old John Brown had agreed to pay the greenhorn one hundred dollars at the end of one year's satisfactory work.

Flurry walked four miles to a crossroads church every Sunday morning. After Mass, he talked with Irish boys who had been in America longer than he. He learned that there was a war going on between the North and the South. That sounded familiar. In Ireland, there'd been war between the transplanted Scotch in the North and the Irish of the South, for centuries.

Maybe a fellow should join up, for the South. Surely a strong young man should fight the Orangemen if his country needed him.

Flurry put the matter up to the priest. Should he enlist in this war?

"Are you a citizen?"

"Sure no, Father."

"Do you know what the war is about, or who is fighting, or where?"

"Sure no, Father. Only that they're fighting the Orangemen."

"Well, this is not your war. Go and apply for citizenship. Learn about this country. Some day it will be your country. You must adopt its ways, and follow its customs. Forget the old country. God bless you."

Flurry went back to his uncle's farm. He would work out his year, he was resolving, but no more. The difference did not seem great between working for his father in Ireland and working for his uncle in America. There still was no shilling for the fair.

The boy from Roaring Water missed the sea. But every day he learned more about crops, soils and weeds. Horses were the most incomprehensible of all the strange institutions of America. What had they got into their heads against Flurry Driscoll? They resented even moderate beating, and not infrequently fought back with heels and teeth. Well, he'd have horses of his own yet, and he'd make them mind!

At the end of his year, he told Uncle John that he planned to move on.

"Aye," said the tough old man. "What will you be afther doing then?"

"I'll go to the Lakes and shovel coal. A dollar a day they pays."

"So? 'Tis a millionaire you'll be in no time! Well, Margaret, you best get out the accounts, and we'll see how it stands with Flurry."

The farmer's wife produced a paper on which was noted the agreement for one hundred dollars for a year's work. There were deductions for three shirts, a pair of shoes, a hat, and sundry items. But there was a sum of eighty-eight dollars remaining. As Farmer Brown paid over the cash, he said, as if granting a tremendous favor, "There was that file you lost, that cost me seventy-five cents, but we'll say nothing about it."

It was Saturday, and the farm hand had the afternoon to himself. He walked to Rochester, eight miles, did his essential shopping, and walked back.

He stepped over to his uncle after supper. "Here is your file," he said, handing over a small package.

"Ah, sure, Flurry, you didn't need to walk sixteen miles and pay out your hard-earned money for this. I said we'd say nothing of it."

"But you said something of it, I think. I lave here in the morning, and I lave owing no man anything. Good night to you."

Flurry was off again on his pilgrimage. His belongings in a pack over his shoulder, he strode along the road, thoughts of the future in this strange and wealthy country crowding his brain.

His objective was nearly two hundred miles away. He had a ride now and again with a farmer, and stopped along the road to work for his meals.

He found work at the fabled wage of a dollar a day at the coal and ore docks of the Erie & Pittsburgh railroad, in Ashtabula Harbor, Ohio. Only ten hours a day with the shovel, and all day Sunday to rest! Here, indeed, was a bit of that free and rich America he had been seeking.

The work shifted from Ashtabula Harbor to Erie, over the Pennsylvania line, depending upon the arrival of ships.

In Erie, Big Flurry found his old shipmate, Alec Burke.

"Well Flurry," said the piping voice, "you got here at last! But you wasted a year on a farm. Meanwhile, I've been working and saving me money. 'Tis not a dock-walloper I'm going to be all me life at all, at all, but a rich man. You'll never catch up with me now!"

Yes, Alec would help him find a nice room at small cost. Alec was wise, knew everything, everybody. He led Big Flurry to a plain house at Second and Plum streets, where lived Jim Brown, a mild-mannered Corkonian, with his wife and large family.

"God bless all here," he intoned, as he entered at the invitation of Mrs. Brown. "I bring ye good luck and a friend. Here is Big Flurry Driscoll from West Cork, a neighbor ourself. He would be afther trying his hand at shoveling coal with us here in Erie. Shelther he must have, and I tells him ye have it here in abundance."

"A fine lad he is too, thank God!" commented little Mrs. Brown.

"We have no rooming house here, Mr. Driscoll," put in the unobtrusive James Brown, "but have a spare room which we like to rent to some good Irish lad who's a friend of Alec's. He would not bring us a drinking man. We are agin drink in this house, I being a Father Mathew man meself."

No, Flurry was not a drinking man, the Browns were assured. A glass of beer, maybe, on a Saturday night, to wash down the coal dust of the week, but no more. Brown was reasonable enough to see that a glass of beer once a week would do no harm, though, for himself, he could not abide the smell of the stuff. Father Mathew, God rest his soul, had done wonders for Ireland, converting hundreds of thousands to the temperance cause, and even inducing thousands of the English to sign the pledge.

Jim Brown proudly marched in the Father Mathew processions, wearing a great sash across his front, and once each month received Holy Communion with the Mathewites over at St. Patrick's church.

Big Flurry became a roomer in the Brown home, but much more. He was accepted as a friend, a member of the household. He paid his rent regularly, in advance, and sometimes brought home little gifts for various members of the family.

Mrs. Brown had a reputation as a scold. Her husband was a quiet man who took refuge in his rosary when his wife launched into one of her scoldings. These were partly lamentations, partly cursings of particular days in the calendar, and in some degree a mere shouting to let off neurotic emotion.

Jim Brown had been married in Ireland, his wife had died, leaving one child. Jim had emigrated to Canada, where he had met this woman. She also had been married in Ireland; her husband had died, leaving her with one child. The two were married, and Jim had got work in the canal construction that was at that time the great enterprise of the New World.

There had been born to the Browns many children, most of whom were now out on their own in the world. There was Will, a husky iron puddler, and there was Jim, working in the railroad yards. Fannie was working out, destined to spinsterhood and hard work for a long lifetime.

Mary had married a fine block of an Irishman named Mike Lynch, and they had two daughters and a son who was a sailor on the Lake.

Margaret had died. Her tragic taking off had much to do, said the neighbors, with Mrs. Brown's strange behavior and frequent scolding rampages.

Margaret, a beautiful, blue-eyed, fair-haired girl, had been betrothed at a very early age, and the date for the wedding had been set.

But the girl took no interest in plans for the wedding. At her mother's behest, she worked on the wedding garments, but she was strangely silent most of the time, and they frequently found her in tears, alone in her bedroom.

A week before the wedding day, Margaret took to her bed, and a doctor was called.

Heart disease, and very bad, said the doctor. The girl must be kept quiet, and must rest. There could be no thought of a marriage for at least a year.

Mother Brown wailed about the house, cursing the fate that struck down the daughter just when she had made such a good match for her. Sure, and maybe the girl brought it on herself, seen

she didn't take to the man at all, at all! 'Twas the judgment of God allay, for her pride, maybe!

Margaret died peacefully, after receiving Extreme Unction. She was buried in her wedding dress.

Mother Brown returned from the funeral in a towering rage against God. Just inside the front door of her house, she fell upon her knees and swore an oath, with terrible maledictions upon herself if ever she should violate it. Never would she pass through that door alive again! "That I may die without the priest and go to hell forever if I do!"

She kept that oath through her years, growing always in bitterness against the Power that had taken her beautiful daughter from her. And such a good match it would have been!

It was a matter of grave concern to the family that Mother Brown did not go to church. No, God had taken her child, so she would never again go to God's house and worship Him. That seemed fair to Mother Brown.

So stood the case when Big Flurry went to live with the Browns in the house beside the Lake.

Many years later, when Big Flurry was far away, the Curse of Grandma Brown had its tragic culmination. The old lady, grown wizened and unbearably crabbed, was much alone, her children having married or gone away to their work.

One afternoon a sudden, black squall came roaring along the Lake. Feeble old Grandma Brown, brooding in her big chair, heard the front storm door slam and bang in the violence of the wind. She opened the front door and caught the storm door as it came toward her, in an effort to latch it shut.

An instant gust flung wide the door, with frail little Grandma clinging to it.

They found her, dying on top of the door, in the yard, when the storm was over. Her oath had been violated in her last hour. She had gone through the door, through which she had sworn never to pass alive.

They sent for the priest, but she was dead before he arrived.





*I have tried to discover what were the ambitions, purposes and life plans of Big Flurry, during his early years in America. When I had taken up writing as a profession, I talked, as much as I dared, to the stooped, white-haired, white-whiskered giant, about these things.*

*But the big Irishman maintained his reserve. As nearly as I could make out, he had at first only the ambition to get away from Ireland, from his father, from the burdensome poverty of his people.*

*With marriage came the ambition to rear a family, and to make good for "the little wooman."*

*It is the same ambition that inspires the average bridegroom of today.*

*Before marriage there was a driving ambition to save money toward whatever opportunity might offer. And there was the conviction that idleness was the unforgivable sin; that shirking the load was the damnation of the weak.*

*So, Big Flurry came face to face with his destiny.*

*He did not seek out the girl. Neither did she seek out him.*

*Forces and circumstances beyond the control or knowledge of either of them brought them together.*

*And so, because Alec Burke knew a countryman named Brown, I am here, attempting to tell you how Big Flurry drove on, in his great strength, toward his fate.*

### 3

THEN there was Ellen.

Youngest but one of the big family of Brown children, she was not more than fifteen when Big Flurry first set eyes on her. She was small, winsome, with deep blue eyes and light brown hair, fair, thin skin, and a way of being polite and respectful toward her elders.

She had been born in Montpelier, Vermont, when her father was working on a canal construction job in that region. At that time, 1850, Montpelier was a spiritual charge of the Jesuits of Montreal. A missionary from that town had baptized Ellen, on one of his infrequent trips in this field.

She had been taken out of school after finishing the sixth grade, because she could be of so much help around the house. Mother Brown was ailing and the other girls of the family were unavailable to help with the housework. Ellen hoped to go back to school, but she had no chance to get at school books until many years later.

The youngest daughter of the Browns had been apprenticed to Mrs. Kelcy, dressmaker to the elite of West Sixth street. Each morning she set out for her work lightheartedly, for she loved sewing, cutting, basting and fitting. The kindly Mrs. Kelcy saw in Ellen her most promising pupil. Encouragement and praise, and never a word of blame or censure, were the incentives of the teacher and mistress, who understood much.

Big Flurry took a liking to little Ellen from the first. Mother Brown was quick to see a possible match.

True, the big Irishman was fourteen years older than the girl. But he had got a late start in life, as did so many of the boys from the auld sod, and he would catch up by hard work and good living.

In the Kelcy household, Ellen had learned to speak American English, without the brogue and inflections that were universal in her home. She had picked up the manners and amenities that were part of the lives of most of the wealthy customers. These characteristics set her apart in the household by the Lake. Big Flurry was captivated, as the little girl grew into a little lady before his eyes.

Mother Brown spent many an evening talking with the big roomer, who was always ready with tales of the auld sod or a plaintive song in Gaelic. Jim Brown sat smoking his pipe, nodding his head, and putting in a word or a phrase now and again. He had a job as crossing watchman now, thank God. 'Twas little enough it paid, but James was not as young as he was when he swung a pick with the canal builders. The Lord would provide.

Now Mother Brown began tossing playful hints to her daughter Ellen.

"The big fellow has got his eye on you, Ellen," she would say.

Ellen would blush and apply herself to her work, in silence, if possible. But when the hints became too frequent they could not be ignored.

"Mother, you know that I'm not interested in any man. I have my work to do."

"Faith then, 'tis worse you might be doing than listening to a compliment from a fine Catholic lad like this same Big Flurry. Don't that you do be getting ideas into your silly little head about marrying some Protestant or maybe an infidel, just because of the fine ladies you see at Mrs. Kelcy's."

"I'm not thinking about marriage or men, Mother. I'm much too young."

Ellen was more and more diligent about her work. Here was a window upon the American world. She would become a dress-maker, one of the best. Then what? Money would come, enough for herself and enough to help her parents in their old age. American atmosphere, and perhaps a chance to finish her schooling somehow. She longed to know the things that people learned in schools.

Mother Brown harped upon the virtues of Big Flurry while Ellen was helping with the late housework.

"Sure, 'tis himself is not down at the saloon with the byes, making ducks and dhakes of his wages. Lucky will be the gaarl that gets such a fine and sensible bye, and a good Catholic ourself. And clane he is. The first roomer I ever had that didn't make the pillow cases as black as Clooty with the coal dust out of his hair. Big Flurry's pillow case is as white as the driven snow. Sure, he turns his shirt wrong side out and puts it under his head to save me white pillow cases. Ah, the fine husband he will make for the gaarl that has sense enough to take him."

Ellen avoided the big suitor as much as possible. She volunteered to stay late at Mrs. Kelcy's on the nights she thought Flurry would be likely to be at home early.

Mother Brown knew how to put on the pressure. The children of a good Irish family are taught to be dutiful, to mind Mother. The old lady went into long tirades, intimating that her youngest daughter was her only stubborn child, that she had begun putting on airs, and didn't even want to talk to a fine, common lad who made an honest living on the docks.

Ellen dared not "talk back." But, tearfully, she explained again and again that Big Flurry was all right, that he should find some Irish girl near his own age, that she had nothing against him and wished him luck. But she did not want to marry. She wanted to finish her apprenticeship and start to work for money.

The youngster took her problems to her only earthly friend, Mrs. Kelcy. And to her friends beyond. She arose early each morning in order to have time to stop at the church and pray, on her way to work. She prayed to God and the Blessed Mary that Big Flurry might find for himself a good Irish girl whom he could make happy, and that he might be happy all his life. But, Dear Mother of God, help thy servant to live as she wants to live, without Big Flurry.

Mrs. Kelcy gave practical advice. Try to weather the storm until the period of apprenticeship should end. Only a few months now. Then there would be money coming in, and maybe Mother Brown would understand.

But Mother Brown was not missing anything in her calculations. She, too, saw the end of the apprenticeship approaching. Then

maybe the girl would put on more airs and refuse to do her mother's bidding, because she would be making money.

As for Big Flurry, he pursued his suit diffidently, bashfully, dubiously. He saw little enough of Ellen. He knew that she was keeping out of his way. He had never courted a girl before. Maybe they all acted that way.

He did not talk to Ellen about his love. When he had tried to introduce the general subject of marriage, she had fled, explaining that she had some penance to say. So the lover was left to talk to the parents, who were more of his own kind.

As for James, sometimes called Jim, there was nothing he could do but smoke his pipe gravely and second his wife's sentiments. Yes, to be sure, Ellen shouldn't be encouraged to be an old maid.

So the morning arrived when it became Mother Brown's solemn duty to speak firmly and finally with Ellen.

As the girl was hurrying for the front door, so as not to be late for Mass before going to work, her mother called:

"You needn't come home here any more unless you promise to obey your mother and marry Big Flurry."

What a morning! What a day!

Prayers were mingled with tears that morning at Mass. Surely the Blessed Virgin and Mrs. Kelcy would understand.

Mrs. Kelcy consoled the heart-broken girl. She told her that she might stay at her house until she had got command of herself and made up her mind. As to the future, they would have a talk about it whenever it seemed good.

On the third day, Ellen returned to her home and her fate. In all of her praying, she could find no guidance that would lead her to disobey her mother.

Here, Mother, is your daughter. Yes, she will marry Big Flurry if you insist. God's will be done.

They were married at St. Patrick's church by Father Tom David on December 17, 1867, with a low Mass and three hacks. Flurry Lynch and Fannie Crowley, old friends, were best man and bridesmaid.

On the return to the Brown home, where wedding breakfast was served, occurred an event of which I was destined to hear much. Somebody remembered that there was no tea at home. The bridegroom, either on his own initiative or on the suggestion of his lovely bride, went into a store and bought half a pound of tea. I do not know what he paid for it. But, as shall appear further in this narrative, that was the most fateful, not to say expensive, half a pound of tea in all recorded history.

The bridal couple moved into a home that Big Flurry had rented some months previously. Eventually, Jim Brown bought a small house and moved it to a space at the end of the long lot he owned at Second and Plum. Big Flurry paid the same rent that any other tenant would pay, and he paid promptly in advance. He never sought favors of relatives.

Three years were spent in waiting and praying for a child. He was born amid great rejoicing, and was baptized John Edward.

There followed at respectable intervals Mary (who became Marie), Katherine (Katie), Margaret, and Thomas Stephen, named for the pastor who baptized him, Father Thomas Stephen McCabe. He was called Stephen, except by his doting parents, who called him Stevie. For some strange reason, the family tombstone calls him Thomas, by which name he was never known. The same stone calls Katie Kattie, a typographical error on the part of the German stone-cutter, Stephen Hesse, who paid more attention to keeping his flowing whiskers properly trimmed than he paid to typography.

Big Flurry continued working on the docks, but he was planning and saving for a new start in life. He took out final citizenship papers in 1871. A hoard of dollars was growing, despite the growth of the family. Luxuries were unknown.

From day labor, Big Flurry graduated to the status of contractor. He took contracts for the unloading of ships laden with coal or iron ore. He hired the labor, bossed it, and worked alongside his men, setting a pace that few could match.

Some of the hands called him stingy, because he never bought a keg of beer for the gang at the finish of a job, as did some other contractors.

When the men suggested that they would be pleased to have the boss set up the beer after the heavy job was finished, Big Flurry's answer was, "No, byes, I said I'd pay ye so much a day, but I did not say I'd buy beer nor anything else for ye. I make me bid on the job, without figuring in any beer. I must save all me money for me own family and for the home we will have, with the help of God, one of these days."

Marital affairs were going along smoothly enough. The frightened bride had become the loving and somewhat careworn mother. She studied to please her husband, as she had long ago learned a wife should do. Big Flurry was proud of his pretty, modest wife, who always seemed just a little more refined and intelligent than most of the folk who came to the house, even though she had not had a great deal of schooling.

Once there was a violent scene. The marriage was still in its early stages, and there were many things the parties to the contract did not know about each other.

Big Flurry was driven nigh to distraction by the first terrible thing he learned about his supposedly superior bride.

She did not know how properly to scale and clean a fish.

The lord of the household brought home a fine mess of fresh fish that he had bought from a fellow down at the dock. He turned the luscious prize over to his bride to prepare for supper.

When he saw the young lady vigorously working with a knife on the fish scales, in the wrong direction, Big Flurry's glorious world collapsed. Forgotten were love and vows and golden dreams.

"Great God, Wooman, what are you thrying to do with the fish? Oh, Jazus, did Peter the Fisherman ever marry such a wife? In the name of God and Saint Pathrick, Wooman, are you going to send me to the poorhouse? Scratching a beggar's arse I'll be, for me wife can't clane a fish!"

In his rage, Big Flurry rushed across the room, seized the fish from the trembling girl, and, deftly and with surprising ease, scaled and cleaned it.

"Look, see! See now? See!" he shouted, as his practiced fingers turned a dead fish into a delicious morsel.



One lesson should be enough for a woman. Fish scaling and cleaning, after all, weren't taught in college. One was born with that much sense, Big Flurry supposed.

But the terror-stricken bride saw nothing, felt only a black fear of this big stranger. She botched up the next fish worse than the first one.

Big Flurry was out of his mind with desperate anger. It had never occurred to him that a girl could grow up without knowing how to scale and clean a fish.

"God damn it to hell, can't you learn?" he shouted. "Jazus come and look at this for a fine fish, ruint!"

He seized her by the throat and shook her. The poor woman was frightened so badly that she suffered no physical pain. As for the indignity of the thing, why, she had married him, hadn't she?

The hot-tempered Irishman repented his violence and made up with the victim. Thereafter, when fish were on the menu, Big Flurry cleaned them himself. For some strange reason, neither Ellen nor any of her children ever cared for fish, or seriously studied about how to prepare them for the table.

Alec Burke came occasionally to the house, with his entering "God bless all here!" He boasted of his prospects, and one day departed for the West, warning his old companions of the docks that he was off to make his fortune in "the gre . . . a . . . aaa . . . at City of Chicago."

Mike Downey was a fellow-shoveler who cherished the dream with Big Flurry of a farm in the West. He was from Cork, too, and he and Big Flurry spent many an evening talking of the old and the new. They would set out for the West as soon as they had saved enough money, but the pile of savings grew slowly enough, ourself.

There were still great stretches of public lands in the prairie states, to be had for a dollar an acre. But the soldiers, returning from the war, had taken most of the good land. They were entitled to 160 acres each, free of charge. By 1875 they had taken the choice acres.

Three times during these years of struggle, savings were depleted by loans to buy passage across for brothers on Long Island.

Red Con came first. A fine broth of a boy he was, and strong in the shoulders. He got a job on the dock at Ashtabula Harbor, shoveling coal with the rest of the boys from county Cork. But he went to school at night, learned penmanship and bookkeeping, and soon moved off the shoveling line into the offices. Long before this change in fortunes, he had repaid the debt to Big Flurry.

Red Con had the knack for making money. With savings from his bookkeeper's wages, he bought a saloon. By the time he was fifty, he owned nearly all the saloons in Ashtabula Harbor. Not only the stock and fixtures, but the real estate as well. When he died, well advanced in years, he left his large family a fat fortune.

Charlie was the next brother to come over, with help of the two brothers already in America. He, too, went to work on the docks. He, too, lived to old age, and left a large family in comfortable circumstances.

As soon as Charlie had paid back the loan, Peter was brought across to the land of promise. He remained a bachelor, acquired a competence, and lived to a mighty age. Like the others, he repaid the loan for his passage as soon as he had earned it.

The brothers got along together famously, visited occasionally at one another's homes, and in later years their families made occasional contacts.

But in the case of Charlie, the American saga of brotherly love didn't start out encouragingly.

Charlie had full directions to guide him from Castle Garden in New York to the home of his brother in Erie. As no one knew exactly when he would arrive, he came as a surprise one Saturday night. He had stopped at a bar down at the depot to inquire exact directions, and had taken on a little more whiskey than one should have aboard when going to visit a sober brother whom one has not seen for several years.

There were greetings all around, and introductions, after Charlie had appeared at the front door and, raising his right hand, had pronounced the customary greeting: "God bless all here." But, when invited to sit, Charlie said, "Aye, I'll sit down in your house, but not till I've thrashed you good, Flurry. You mind the time, that

Sunday morning when you left for America? Before we started for church that morning, you called me a liar, down by the water. I couldn't hit you then, because we were on our way to Mass, but I haven't forgotten. You ran away to America to avoid me. I'm here now to make you take back that dhirty word you called me. You take it back?"

"No, by Gol, I won't take it back, for a liar you were and a liar you are to say that I came to America to avoid you!"

"Then, take that!" Charlie swung hard to Flurry's right ear. The two were about the same size, but Big Flurry was in the pink of condition and Charlie had not been living on American fare.

One punch from the host, and the guest lay stretched on the floor.

The hostess, meantime, had run to the kitchen in panic and shame. Big Flurry called her back.

"Bring here a basin of cold wather, Ellen! I'm afraid I hit the bye too hard. 'Tis a fool he'll be when he wakes up."

Ellen brought a basin of water, a cold cloth, and a pint of whiskey. Charlie soon came 'round, sat up, laughed, and shook his host by the hand.

"A liar I am, and you proved it, Flurry," he said, good-naturedly.

"Sure, I'm sorry I hit you so hard, and may God forgive me," answered the host.

The young wife admonished: "Flurry, you don't know your strength, and you should never hit anybody. You might go to state's prison yet for hitting somebody in a friendly argument like this."

"Aye," said the penitent Flurry. "I'll promise you and the Blessed Virgin that I'll never hit anybody agin."

Within a month he had breached this well-meant vow. He went to a dentist with an aching tooth.

"Pull the damned thing out!"

The dentist argued for saving the tooth, and, when the patient told him to "belay the gab and pull the damned tooth out," suggested a painless extraction, costing a dollar.

"What do I care about the pain!" shouted the coal-heaver. "Do you think I'm an auld wooman? Pull it out, now, before I clout you on the side of the head!"

The dentist reached in and extracted the tooth, none too gently. Big Flurry sat there, spitting blood, for a few minutes. Then he let out a shout.

"God damn it, you pulled the wrong tooth! I've still got the toothache."

The dentist explained that there would be pain for a while, but that it was the infected tooth that had come out. He offered the tooth in evidence.

"Sure, God knows that knows me heart there's nothing wrong with that tooth!" said Big Flurry. "It's as strong as a boar's tusk. And me tooth aches as bad as ever. I wisht I was in hell!"

The dentist offered many reassurances, and gave the patient a couple of tablets to take for the pain. Big Flurry threw the medicine on the floor.

"'Tis a dhrug-taker you'd be making of me, is it? You flops-ile-guy, you sthreel, you omathan!"

The professional man laid a hand on the shoveler's shoulder and started to steer him toward the door.

"Take care of yourself now!" cried the angry Irishman. And with a swing to the jaw that must have loosened some teeth, he laid the dentist cold on the floor.

He tossed a half dollar at the senseless figure and left, howling with pain and rage.

I suspect the dentist had extracted the right tooth. When he died at the age of eighty-four, Big Flurry had all his teeth except that one, and they were white and sound. He had never used a brush on them. And never, after that day, did he have a toothache.

Time came when Big Flurry and Mike Downey had saved what they considered the essential minimum for the venture in the West. Each had three thousand dollars, plus spending money for a trip. Oh, not extravagant expense money, to be sure! But they had learned that nobody but rich men and fools ever paid railroad fare.

As the ice broke up in the Lake in the spring of 1878, Big Flurry and Mike resolved to go. Now or never, in the Name of God.

Their savings changed into gold coins and concealed in leather

belts, they said goodbye to their families and walked in the cold dawn to the railroad yards. They slipped aboard a freight that was bound for Chicago.

On another cold dawn they found themselves in the strange frontier town of St. Paul, Minnesota. They tramped the streets, drank hot coffee, met Irishmen in droves. Yes, land was to be had very cheap. But the best land was around Lake City, said a farm hand whom they met in a saloon.

In the Lake City area the searchers found land they liked, but prices were high. Big Flurry had resolved to pay cash for everything. Two thousand dollars was the limit he would go for a farm, since the other thousand would be needed for setting up housekeeping and buying horses, implements and seed. A Lake City farmer would sell a rich farm for three thousand, but would take a mortgage for one.

"No margridge!" said Flurry, firmly. "'Tis not a debtor's arse I want to be scratching in me auld age. Come, Mike, we'm best be looking south."

More riding between, under, and on top of freight trains, and, when patience was almost gone, the two wayfarers found themselves strolling up Douglas avenue, as wide a street as ever they had seen, in the frontier town of Wichita, Kansas.

They entered an office where they saw the sign:

PAT WHALEY—REAL ESTATE AND INSURANCE

Within they found Pat, a city slicker with a plausible manner and an eye to the Irish immigrants who were surging westward in search of land. How had he missed two such fine Irishmen at the depot? Why, of course, he met all the trains, just to make sure that his Irish friends didn't fall into the hands of Jews or even Protestants. He would see that they were well cared for and he hoped they would settle in or near this growing city of Wichita.

Within a week Pat had sold them neighboring farms in Butler County, about thirty miles from the town. They were upland farms, with thin, dry, unproductive soil and almost no improvements.

The two greenhorns knocked together some sort of farm buildings and sent for their families.

Ellen Driscoll had five youngsters to shepherd on that long journey, and there were not even reclining seats in the day coach in which she traveled. But trainmen and travelers were remarkably kind, particularly at the several stops where change of trains had to be made.

Upland farming was bitter business. Crops were poor, no matter how hard one worked or how favorable the season. Generally, there was drought. The farmers lived in constant fear of another visitation of locusts, or grasshoppers. There had been a plague of the ravenous insects a short time before arrival of the new farmers from Erie, and the neighbors told tall tales of how the clothes had been eaten off the line, every spear and leaf of green had been taken, and the sun had been darkened at noon by the clouds of grasshoppers passing overhead.

One more child was added to the family during the four years it spent on the upland. He was baptized Florence, for his father and all the other Florence Driscolls, back along the line.

It was shortly after this event that Big Flurry drove to Wichita with a wagonload of wheat, taking Mike Downey along for company. The two old cronies were close neighbors and good friends. They liked to talk over their farm problems together, at the same time exchanging tidings from the Old Country, if there were any, and news from Erie and the old companions of the docks.

The wheat brought a good price. Big Flurry, with nearly twenty dollars in his pocket, was in a liberal mood. He treated his friend to supper at Tangney's Hotel, on South Topeka avenue, though the meals at this exclusive emporium cost twenty cents each. With a bottle of whiskey that set the prosperous wheat baron back fifty cents, the two cronies spent the night in the feed yard where the horses and wagon were parked. Prairie hay of good quality went with the parking privilege, and Big Flurry had brought along corn for the horses' feeding. Since the two farmers attended to the horses,

the charge for the night's lodging for men and beasts, plus all the hay needed, was ten cents. That was not considered unreasonable.

Some merchandise, including a plowshare, groceries, a ten-cent bag of hard candy for the children of each family, and two bolts of cotton print goods that Ellen had asked for, occupied space in the rear of the wagon-box as the two Irishmen got under way the next day.

The forenoon was hot, but heavy clouds seemed to portend rain. The two farmers, sitting on a board across the almost empty wagon-box, their feet now dangling, now perched upon the rim of the end-boards in front of them, talked of the vagaries of Kansas weather, and how the land needed rain.

"By Gol, Mike, I think we're going to be caught in a rain before we get home," said Flurry, pointing to great accumulations of black clouds, mixed with fleecy white, in the southwest.

"Aye, see the lightning!" said Mike.

Though it was broad daylight, a strange darkness was spreading in all directions.

Mike suggested that a dhrop of the crathur would do no one harm in a case of this kind, and besides, the women at home were a bit on the prohibition side, and it might be just as well to dispose of that second bottle before reaching home.

Big Flurry stopped the team at the crest of a high hill in the mile-square hayfield known as the California Section, and the cronies had long swigs from the bottle.

"It looks like we may be in for a bad squall," suggested Big Flurry, pointing his new whip at the majestic mass of black, with white patches circulating within it, that was approaching with noise and lightning, from the southwest.

"Holy Mother of God, Flurry! What kind of a squall is this, I don't know? Hell is coming!"

From the advancing bank of inky cloud, fragments of black and white were detaching themselves with curious and systematic method. Other patches came racing to join them, and all got together to form a sort of funnel that reached from the cloud bank

straight down to the earth. Then the formation moved faster than ever.

The funnel became a huge elephant's trunk, sweeping the blighted earth furiously, as though in intelligent anger. From the upper part of the trunk, lightning flashed.

Ominous calm had descended upon the earth where the two farmers were transfixed by the strange sight ahead of them. Successive strata of cold and hot air drifted lazily by.

"It's a cyclone!" cried Mike. "I've heard the Yankees tell about them, but I never believed a damned word of it. Holy Mary pray for us!"

The two jumped from the wagon, unhitched the horses, tied them to a front wheel, and crawled under the wagon, just as a swirl of hailstones came down with wicked force.

An unearthly roar, resembling the metallic confusion of a hundred express trains in a race, came from the approaching storm. The horses were rearing in terror. The two farmers crawled out to quiet them. They saw that the tornado (which Kansans universally called a cyclone) was passing some three miles to the east. A few outer currents hit the men and threatened to upset the wagon, but no harm was done.

The watchers on the hill could see, in the bright sunshine that had succeeded the darkness of the storm, great masses of debris, showering down upon the countryside, as the swaying funnel sucked up houses, outbuildings, crops and trees, and tons of the earth itself, and swept them into the clouds.

"We'm best be getting home, in the Name of God, Mike," said Flurry, as the two hurriedly hitched up the team.

"Indade yes, if we have any homes to go to," responded the other.

"Thanks be to God that I built that cyclone cellar last summer," said Big Flurry. "I hope the wife and young ones had time and sense enough to get into it."

The cyclone cellar was a cave, with its one door toward the northeast. Tornadoes come from the southwest. Big Flurry had heeded the advice of veteran Kansans in building his shelter south-



west of his house, close enough so that the family could reach it quickly in an emergency.

He and a hired man had cut the prairie sod carefully, dug out the hole in the ground, set up the simple framework of stout timbers, covered this with earth, and then re-laid the prairie sod. This kind of cave was called a dugout, and was generally believed to furnish protection for the lives of those fortunate enough to reach it before a tornado struck, unless a heavy house should be dropped upon it.

The dugout was used for storing milk and butter in summer, since its interior was comparatively cool in the hottest weather.

Mike and Flurry had exchanged plans for their respective caves, during planning and building.

"I hope to God," said Mike, as the two drove homeward, "that I made them timbers strong enough in me cyclone cellar."

"Aye," said Big Flurry, without much reassurance in his tone. He considered Mike a bit on the loose side in his farming, and had no great faith in his thoroughness.

It was dusk when the two passed the Long farm, only a short distance from their own homes. The Longs lived in a long, narrow, three-room house.

There was the Long house, intact, nicely balanced on top of a whiskey barrel that had served as a rain barrel.

Big Flurry drove into the yard. "We can't pass up a neighbor in trouble," he said.

Answering a hail, Neighbor Long said that the family was unhurt, but was unable to move, lest the balance of the house be disturbed and all be lost. The tornado had lifted the house high in the air, but had set it down so gently that not even a dish had been broken in the pantry part of the kitchen.

The rescuers asked anxiously for news of their families. They were rewarded with peals of laughter from the imprisoned Longs.

"How in hell do you think we'd be getting news when we haven't dared to stir out of our chairs all afternoon?" asked Long.

"Thruth for you!" answered Flurry. The two set a post under each end of the house to steady it, and helped the curiously im-

prisoned family to the ground. Next day several neighbors, themselves sorely hit by the disaster, helped Long put his house back on its foundation.

Downey's house was missing when the two reached the spot where it had been. But the family, unhurt, stood about, happily congratulating itself upon its good fortune. The cyclone cellar had protected them. If they had remained in the house, most of the occupants surely would have been killed.

"Well, let ye pile in," said Big Flurry, "and be quick about it. We'll go to my place now, and if there's anything there, ye are welcome to it, in the Name of God."

There was a packed wagonload of Downeys when Big Flurry, trying to make his eyes outrace the tired horses, drove into his own yard. They saw at once that the kitchen part of the house was gone and that the cyclone cellar had collapsed completely.

This was the story they heard:

Old Mr. Cam, the only hired man on the farm, came in from the field, white hair and whiskers flying in the breeze, to tell the family that a tornado was coming. The family, looking through the windows, saw nothing but blackness. Suddenly there was a crash, as the kitchen collapsed and was carried high into the air.

The hired man caught the knob of the door leading to the kitchen and held the door shut. But it was a strain. Mother held to the hired man, to keep him from being swept outward, and John held to Mother.

"Let ye all pray," was Mother's only word to the children. In a tight spot, she still lapsed into the Irish "ye" of her old home.

"Well," said the old man, "now is as good a time as any for praying."

And so, the storm was over. Rather, it had passed on to further destruction along the way.

There had been no time to get to the cyclone cellar. Undoubtedly, anybody who had got into it would have been buried alive.

The Downeys stayed until part of a new house had been built for them, a matter of a month or so. There wasn't room for all of them in the house, but the men and boys of both families evacuated

to the haystacks and outbuildings for sleeping, and the women and girls made themselves comfortable in what was left of the Driscoll house.

"Thanks be to God," said Mike Downey, "that it wasn't in the dead of winter it came upon us."

Big Flurry began looking about for a new farm. It was obvious that one couldn't make a proper living for a large family on this piece of dry, hard, infertile soil. Pat Whaley was called in for advice. Never did Big Flurry blame Pat for having sold him a worthless farm.

"Sure, how could Pat know that wheat wouldn't grow on it, three years out of four?" he said.

In the fourth year of his farming venture, Big Flurry sent the family back to Erie, to live with the Grandpa Browns until he should make a new home for all. Pat managed to sell the farm for more than had been paid for it. He then sold his friend a quarter section only a short distance east of Wichita, but this didn't appear suitable, after thorough tests, so he sold it again, at a profit of \$1,000.

Big Flurry was doing well enough as a buyer and seller of land, but he wanted a permanent home.

In the Arkansas river valley, four miles south of the town of Wichita, he found a fine bottom farm, with deep, black soil, and some sand. Yes, the widow would sell. Her husband had got the farm on a patent from President Grant, and there had never been a transfer of the land, except that from the government.

For \$2,500 cash the widow sold the farm, 166 acres, more or less, to Florence Driscoll.

And that is how Big Flurry happened to be bawling to high heaven as he looked upon the spot where, in the Name of God, he intended to build a home for himself and his family.

*When did Big Flurry begin to realize that the marriage had been a tragic mistake?*

*I have often wondered. So much happened before my birth. So much happens before the birth of any one of us. We are poor judges of the status of our parents, or of our children, for that matter.*

*It was my impression that ambition to make good on the frontier, anxiety about crops and children, and hope for eventual understanding kept the strangely mated couple close to each other during the Erie years and the early days in Kansas.*

*While the children were very young, both parents lavished affection upon them, each in a different way.*

*But it must have been evident to the Old Man by the time he was fairly launched upon the Kansas venture that he was destined to remain an alien in this incomprehensible country.*

*He could not read or write. Although he had Mike Downey and Martin Gleason and a few other Irish cronies for occasional conversation, he must have begun to notice that the Yankees, as the American neighbors were called, laughed at his Irish accent. He was intelligent enough to know that he was considered an odd one, perhaps even by his own family.*

*More and more, he fell back upon silence and action.*

*More and more, he retired within himself. For he was proud, strong, and capable.*

THE house that Big Flurry built was a simple piece of architecture, designed by himself and the two carpenters who worked with him. The foundation was a perfect rectangle, running north and south in its longer dimension.

The first floor was about equally divided into two rooms. The north room was the parlor. The south room was the dining room and living room of the family and, until a kitchen was added a few years later, had to serve for cooking too.

A narrow stairway, steep and turning, led from the dining room to a landing on the second floor. Three bedrooms opened off this landing, which was known as the hall.

The plans included a large wing to contain a kitchen, but the farmer had wasted enough time in building operations for the present. He was anxious to get started with his farm work. When the main wing of the new home was completed and partly furnished, he sent for the family once more.

On this trip, the mother had six youngsters to handle, but John was old enough to help with management of the younger ones, while Mother devoted most of her attention to Baby Florence. He was not well. He had fallen on the sidewalk in Erie and had hurt his head.

This was election time, in the fall of 1884. At Chicago, where there had to be a change of trains, an election mob, drunk and bent upon mischief, seized the train, uncoupled some of the cars, and started running away with them, helter-skelter.

The car in which the little family from Erie was riding was overrun by the hoodlums, and the trainmen kidnaped.

This incident did not add anything to the calmness of the baby.

At Kansas City he was so ill that the journey was interrupted while the harassed mother sought a doctor. She found a Dr. William Croskey, who examined the child and diagnosed the case as water on the brain. Yes, the baby might get well. Looking at the flock of children, then at the sick baby, and then at the careworn mother, the medical man shook his head and said, "I pity you, poor woman!"

Though we must jump ahead of the story to do it, this is the place to record one of those coincidences that help to make life interesting.

The sick baby eventually became a strong and healthy lawyer in Kansas City. An aged client came to him in regard to a claim against him by the building in which the client had his office. He was Dr. Croskey. He remembered the incident of the poor woman with the flock and the sick baby. Just forty-four years after the baby had cried loudly in his office, Dr. Croskey fell on the sidewalk, suffered a concussion of the brain, and died. The attorney who settled his estate was that same baby of the brain concussion case.

From Kansas City to Wichita, the journey was interrupted only by the howling of the sick baby. Arrived at the farm, the family was delighted with its new home, though it was obvious that there were years of work ahead before the place could be made cozy and home-like.

About a year after the settlement of the family, in the new house, an event occurred at the supper table.

Mother ventured to remark, while modestly looking at her plate, that it was about time that she should be going to town to get some things. That was as close as she felt she should come to actual statement of the case.

"I've been thinking that maybe it's about time I should be going to town to get some things."

Marie, who was thirteen years old, knew just what was meant. There was going to be another baby in a few weeks. That was obvious to any mature observer. One didn't talk of such things. Still, the time was at hand, and Mother was always careful to provide as well as possible for contingencies.

Ominous silence greeted the observation about going to town to get some things.

Still looking at her plate, and blushing, the speaker continued in a faltering voice:

"We don't want to be like Hannah Leonard."

Hannah, a neighbor back in Erie, was notoriously unprepared whenever a little blessing came to her, and once there were twins, with nothing to clothe them, so that the neighbors had had to provide hastily. In the Driscoll household it was a proverb that one should never be like Hannah Leonard. Reference to Hannah now was by way of comedy relief, in the hope that Himself, at the other end of the table, would not feel too sour about the necessity for going to town and getting some things.

The Old Man jumped to his feet with a roar, slamming his two fists upon the table so that dishes clattered to the floor.

"To town, is it, Wooman?" he shouted, his face flushing and his throat working in rage. "To spend money allay?"

"I suppose I am to squeeze the money through me shins? Where else am I to get it, in troth? Glory be to God that made us all, Wooman, you talk to me about buying some things?"

"'Tis meself that started spending money the day I bought the half a pound of tay! Through me shins, through me shins, through me shins!" he intoned, as he tramped back and forth at his end of the dining room.

He often referred to this mysterious rite of squeezing money through his shins. This, to him, was the apogee of the impossible, the triumph of the absurd. When he wished to impress upon the family the impossibility of getting money, he took the position that he was being asked to produce cash by this seemingly miraculous operation upon his foreleg.

Now he began to dance around the dining table, shaking the rafters with his roaring and jumping about.

"A beggar's arse, a beggar's arse, a beggar's arse I'll be scratching until I die!" he chanted.

He began throwing plates, cups and saucers from his end of the table, while shouting curses upon the day he was born. The dishes

were not aimed at anybody, but went splintering against the walls with a great clatter, starting all the children to crying and screaming.

"I wisht I was in hell!" he bawled, as he turned his back and started for the door.

Once outside, he returned to the window and shouted, "I'll go and hang meself, so they can sell me bones for cash. 'Tis far better than squeezing it through me shins, ourself!"

But he went to the stable, harnessed a team, and was off for the fields, cutting corn for the hogs, beating the horses, shouting to the trees and the heavens to witness his misery and calling upon God to strike him dead if God had ever heard anything more unreasonable than a woman when she wants to go to town and buy a half a pound of tay.

When he had gone, Mother quieted the crying flock, and said to Marie, "Come now, we'll clean up this mess, in the Name of God. It's too bad Himself had to break this cup with the picture of a little boy on it. I always liked that one. Let us save the pieces and maybe we can cement them together. I don't feel just steady enough to do it now.

"Himself is very mad, and I know he means that he won't let us go to town to buy the things. But don't you worry. God will help us as He always has. Just keep calm and pray to the Blessed Virgin to help us think about what we should do. Don't let the little ones step on the broken glass while we're cleaning up.

"I have a fine idea already about how to fix everything. And I know it will please your father."

That afternoon, Mother began soaking a half-dozen flour sacks in water with a little wood ashes added.

Flour came in cotton sacks, each sack containing 68 pounds. The flour we bought, sometimes five or six sacks at a time, was milled in Halstead, a small town in the wheatfields, and was branded "Second to None" or "U-Knead-It." The lettering on one side of the sack was in red and blue.

Flour sacks were always saved, as was anything else that might ever be used to substitute for something that was sold at the stores. All dishwipers were made of these flour sacks. Many of the farm



families in the Valley used flour sacks to make summer underclothes for their daughters.

Soaking the sacks properly and patiently, and afterwards bleaching them in the sun by spreading them on the grass in the west yard, Mother could obliterate the brand completely. It was a matter of pride in our family that whatever garments were made of flour sacking at our house were as good and decent as any garments that could be bought at Munson & McNamara's big store in town, and much better sewed. No brands showed.

The Stoogers were looked upon with some disdain because their daughters appeared in school with pants that showed, when the wind blew, the bright brand, "Second to None" or "U-Knead-It," right across their behinds.

So the things for the new baby would be made of flour sacking, which was strong and closely woven. Skilled fingers worked, and the treadle of the second-hand Davis sewing machine kept going at all hours. We were not to be caught like Hannah Leonard, please God.

It would have been nicer, in this case, to have got a bolt of cotton goods from Cash Henderson's store. Despite his forbidding name, Cash would trust the little lady from the farm south of town.

"I'll pay you when the blackberries come in."

"That's all right, Mrs. Driscoll," the florid Scotchman would reply. "You are always welcome here. Your money is as good as anybody's, and I wish some of my rich customers would pay as promptly as you do."

Well, it was not to be, this time. Himself had spoken. One must make the best of it, though indeed there had been plans for some lovely dresses for this baby. Maybe it would be the last, in the providence of God. She was thirty-five now, and perhaps not many years left for giving birth. She sat awhile by the west window in the dusk, and prayed for a boy and the grace to rear him as befits a Christian.

There was the question of thread. Not a spool was left in the house. Cash Henderson and Tom Lynch had boxes of Clark's O. N. T. on their shelves. Number 60, white. One used a lot of it

in the course of a year, but now there was none, and one would not dare ask Himself to buy a spool or two next time he went to town.

God would provide. And He did.

There was an old linen hard-boiled shirt of Big Flurry's that had not been worn since the wedding day. The bosom was so stiff that the Boss had denounced it as "vanyitty" and had sworn never to wear it again. His wife had made him two softer shirts to take the place of this vain garment for Sundays.

So the busy hands set to work, raveling out the white linen thread from the shirt bosom. It wasn't a difficult job. The eldest daughter sat by, holding the baby and talking in tones of intimate confidence.

"We will have good things for the new one," said Mother to Daughter. "Fine linen thread! King Solomon had no better. And when Our Lord was born, His Blessed Mother had no such linen thread for His little garments. They wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, like the Italians do in Erie, and laid Him in a manger. It seems sinful to use better things than Our Lord had in His poor manger. But Himself is in a terrible temper still, and we must do the best we can. Thanks be to God for His blessings.

"When this one comes, Himself will be happy and tame again. I hope it will be a boy, because I think that would please him. When I tell you that the time is near, I want you to wake John, and he will ride up and get Mrs. Simpson. I will be thinking of Our Blessed Lady, and how she had no neighbor woman to help her. God is good to us."

When the hour was at hand, John rode Old Tom rapidly to the Simpson cottage, less than a mile away, and the kindly little lady, who served as volunteer midwife, without fee, throughout the neighborhood, arrived with many packets of herbs and simples which she raised in her own yard and recommended for every ill of human flesh.

At dawn on the morning of October nineteenth, 1885, I was born. Big Flurry was sitting in front of the stove in the dining room, where a light fire had been kept going through the night, when Mrs. Simpson came downstairs to present to Himself his seventh child and fourth son.

"I warrant you're glad it's a boy," said the little lady, in her English accent, which seemed so unique in this part of the world.

"Aye, Misthress Simpson, we take what God gives us, and we are thankful. A healthy bye, plaze God?"

He was assured that the new heir showed no evidence of disease or malformation, and then he went to bed.

Doctors were not called in for mere childbirth in our home. Few farmers thereabout bothered with physicians in such cases of natural child-bearing. Neighborly women who were skilled in such matters volunteered their services and were amply repaid by the honest thanks they received, with the prospect of a polite jar of jam or peach preserves later in the year.

*Big Flurry was, in those days, devoted to the job of building a home and a family.*

*He was transforming himself from a sailor and fisherman of the salt water into a farmer and home-builder of the prairies.*

*That was a struggle.*

*The earth did not yield easily to the efforts and labors of the new farmer, either. Drought and wind and flood and insect pests had to be battled against.*

*And the effort to understand the American wife and to establish a companionship which might dissipate the loneliness, was beginning to foreshadow frustration.*

*As the children grew, they seemed to become her children, not his.*

*This was surely a strange country. Big Flurry tried to become a part of it. He even went to vote. But that was not easy.*

*He had to remember to take his naturalization papers with him when he went to the polls. Then, someone was told off to enter the booth with him and make the check marks opposite the names, since he could not read.*

*After some unpleasant experiences at the polls, he refused to vote any more. When Neighbor Dan Tierney told him that he should accompany him to the polls to vote against an A. P. A. candidate for roadmaster, the Old Man kept on following the plow down the long furrow.*

*"Dan," he said, "I don't give a damn about the A. P. A., but I hates cockleburrs. Maybe you'm best go home and kill some of them out of your caarn. Get up, Prince!"*

## 5

MARY was called by her full name, Mary Ellen, or merely Manie-gaarl, by her father. During girlhood she was May to the rest of the family, and when she felt young ladyhood coming on, she became Marie. To simplify matters, she will be Marie in this narrative, except in special instances.

She was washing my diapers on the back porch, while Mother was still in bed, when Big Flurry came in from the field for a drink of water.

"What are you doing there, Manie-gaarl, I don't know?" asked the Boss.

"Just washing out some of the baby's diapers," she replied, bending to her task.

Now, the Old Man had a tender spot in his heart for this hard-working, earnest, even-tempered daughter. And today he was feeling in top form.

"Ah, wisha, 'tis a shame for you to be breaking your back over a tub of stinking diapers," proclaimed the Head of the House.

He was on the porch in an instant. One by one he fished the diapers out of the tub and tossed them far out into the weeds, in the back yard.

"Hoosh!" he cried, as each wet diaper went sailing through space. Marie stood by with bulging eyes.

"But Dad," she pleaded, "the baby must have clean diapers!"

"Hoosh!" he shouted, as the last one went sailing. "Sure, there's plenty more in Lynch's store! 'Tis no kind of work for a fine gaarl like yourself. Go in now, and look after your mother. Diapers be damned!"

When Himself had gone back to his plowing, Marie changed the

water in the tub, hunted up the half-washed diapers in the weeds, and went on with her job, only half an hour delayed by the Old Man's generous gesture. She was a practical girl. She knew that there were plenty more in Lynch's store, and that they would, in all probability, remain there, so far as the farm household was concerned.

Our Mary was the Scriptural Martha, "of the careful soul and the troubled heart." It was her responsibility to see that the gears engaged, that the household operated when Mother was ill, that all the children got off to school on time, though she might have wished to be spending more time in school herself.

I was playing on the floor in Mother's bedroom, dimly conscious of the circumstance that Mother was ill, but wholly unaware of the fact that I had just missed having a little brother as a future playmate. I was not quite three years old, and did not place any significance in the gentle pats on the head I received when I came near the bed. Nor did I give more than passing notice to the tears that were shed for the little brother who had not lived to be baptized.

But I was mildly bored by the atmosphere of the place. I remembered the watermelons that John had been gathering a day or so ago, with me, held on someone's lap, in the wagon. I remembered the luscious red fruit of the watermelon, and how sweet it was, when one was broken in loading.

I set out for adventure, crawling down the stairs, going out through the kitchen door, and staggering down the hill toward the western sun.

I had slyly waited until Marie went upstairs to wait on Mother before going through the back door. Now I was free, and I would somehow manage to get at that watermelon patch.

It was a hot day, as Kansas days can be hot, and the sand west of the house burned through my shoes, filled my shoes, made me miserable. Well, this was no time for quitting. The watermelon would fix everything up.

The boundary line between our farm and Steve Balch's north forty was only an eighth of a mile west of our house. Along the

wire fence grew a strip of wild plum bushes. Nature had planted them there to hold the sand, which otherwise would drift with the high winds. The pioneers, having a great deal of natural sense which their successors did not always display, permitted the plum bushes to hold down the sand patches here and there. Thus, there were no dust storms in that place, in that time.

But the sand plums, however useful, were wicked, as are most living things that grow out of arid sand under scorching sun. They were low bushes, covered with sharp thorns.

I crawled on my belly through the plum patch, under the barbed wire fence, and into the cornfield. The corn had been laid by. The shady alleys between the tall rows of corn were inviting at the field's edge. Perhaps this way lay the watermelon patch.

The going was not bad between the corn rows. I kept staggering along in a straight line, not bothering to change alleys. Ants bit me, sand got into my shoes in greater quantities. I pulled the shoes off, scratched the ant bites, and went on, talking to myself about the watermelon.

The corn rows were exactly a quarter of a mile long. Toward the western end of the field the terrain rose toward The Sandhill. There were many sandhills in this alluvial valley, but in our neighborhood everybody knew what hill you meant when you said someone was stuck with a load of produce or a threshing machine on The Sandhill. That was the hill that almost blocked Hydraulic avenue, the section line west of the Balch farm. The public road went straight over the hill. Here, too, a big patch of wild plum bushes held the sand from blowing. The highway builders had not cut off the bushes, except in a narrow lane that provided passage for one vehicle at a time.

The tramp through the cornfield had been somewhat stuffy, and it had taken a long time. The sun was sinking as I reached the barbed wire fence along the highway and crawled under it into the welcome coolness of the unsunned earth under the thick but thorny bushes.

There I fell asleep, after bawling about the bloody scratches the thorns had made on my face, hands, and legs.

When I awoke, I crawled onward, always toward the setting sun, and therefore toward the highway. On the very edge of the narrow wagon track, I became frightened. This was no watermelon patch, and I was surely lost.

I was bawling mightily when I saw a brave bay horse, drawing a shining top buggy, come up The Sandhill toward me. With wonder at the magnificence of the equipage, I ceased to cry, but sat still, lest I scratch my head more grievously on the spikes of the low bushes.

The driver cramped the buggy sharply toward the left, got out, and in three or four long-legged strides, had picked me up.

"Why it's the Driscolls' baby, Kate!" he said. "He's lost, and we'd better take him home right away."

Climbing back into the buggy, Steve Balch handed me to his sweet young wife, Kate. She held me close, kissed me, and told Steve to drive fast. Old Standard, the lean bay trotter, did the mile or so, around the corner and back to our yard, in fast time. As we turned into the Driscoll driveway, Steve handed the reins to Kate, and himself took the baby. Holding me high in front of him, so that watchers might see and be relieved, he shouted, "Here's your baby!"

There was rejoicing over the return of the prodigal. Messengers were dispatched to bring back Dad and John, who were afoot with lanterns, searching orchards, fields and pasture.

As for me, I resumed my playing in the sickroom, pausing only to explain, "Couldn't hiney home; couldn't hiney Mama; couldn't hiney watermelon patch." That was long quoted as a very clever pronouncement.

Big Flurry now set out to finish the home he had begun while his family was absent. The Valley farm had proved as rich and productive as he had hoped. There was cash left over from the real estate deals, and it should be put to work for the comfort and convenience of the growing family.

A large wing to the east of the rectangular house had been provided for in the original plans. Two carpenters were hired when



THE

the corn was laid by and the wheat stacked. One was a dark Swede with a sweeping mustache, named Dave Erickson.

The other was a nondescript little fellow called Frank Smith, agreeable enough, but not so interesting to a small boy as the big, hearty, playful Davy. The family referred to the team as Davy and Smith, thus indicating the friendliness of the one and the impersonal character of the other.

This Kitchen Part, as it was called, was to be something of a masterwork, undertaken deliberately, planned carefully, and put up without stint or haste.

In ground dimensions it was larger than the original house, but it was to be, for the present, only one story high. To begin with, it was to have a magnificent cellar.

Teams with hand-dump scrapers worked busily a week, carving out a liberal cellar under the whole of the new wing. It was a deep cellar, having stone walls covered with plaster. Its ceiling was higher above its floor than was the ceiling of any other room in the house. Big Flurry, having tasted the Kansas climate for several years, had come to the conclusion that a deep hole in the earth would be useful for many purposes, and cool, besides.

Big Flurry was no architect, and he may have made mistakes. Mother often complained that the kitchen was dark, that the porches, north and south, were makeshift structures, apparently devised with an eye to cheapness, and that the doors did not fit their casings. Also, there was only a dirt floor in the cellar.

These may have been shortcomings, but the Master didn't like to hear them mentioned. As for the cellar floor, it was of tamped earth, but it was the only cellar in the Valley that didn't suffer from regular spring and fall seeping of water from the flow of the underground river.

Before the stringers were put in place for the floor of the Kitchen Part, the master builder had two massive pieces of furniture lowered into the cellar by man-and-horse power. The man from Roaring Water had an incurable habit of picking up salvage. He couldn't pass up a wreck, whether it be of a ship, a house, or a town. He was constantly hauling away useless things, taking them to his farm, and

hoping that a day might come when that waste might serve a purpose.

Somewhere in Wichita, he had got an enormous butchershop refrigerator. It was a room in itself, with hooks for hanging sides of beef and pork. Its exterior construction was of closely matched wood, in several layers. Its inner lining was of zinc. In the four or five inches between inner and outer skins, there was a stuffing of sawdust.

That was perfection in refrigeration in that day. You put the ice on the floor, and the cold air simply stayed inside, with the meat. In this refrigerator, seven or eight men could have taken refuge in case of an air raid.

The great creation was hauled to the farm and set up about three feet from the west wall of the cellar. It might have served a luxurious purpose during the life of the inhabitants of that house—if it had only had a door.

Dad got the refrigerator for nothing, but it was worth much less than that. One whole side had been a door. That side was missing. Perhaps it had been wrecked in a tornado. I never learned. There the thing stood, blocking the way to the west shelving along the cellar wall, and uselessly occupying space, and there it probably still stands.

The other bit of salvage that was put into the cellar, never to be removed so long as the house should stand above, was a sort of cupboard that had come out of some grocery store that must have fallen upon evil days. It was of wood, three or four shelves high, and twelve or fourteen feet long. One door was missing, and there was other damage that gave the thing a decidedly plebeian appearance. It was not altogether useless. It stood against the north wall, and served for winter storage of jellies.

The floor of the Kitchen Part was made flush with the rest of the first floor of the house, for even city architects in those days had not thought of the idea of setting traps for children and old folk by putting each room on a different level. This left room for a cellar window, two and a half feet high, on the north and south walls. But the porches were built out over the windows, so that the panes

never admitted any light that could be noticed. It was not possible to wash them on the outside, so they became merely nominal windows in the course of years.

Chief entrance into the cellar was by a flight of stairs on the east, covered by a gently slanting construction with lift-up doors. The doors were so heavy that only a strong man could lift them.

There was another means of entrance and egress. It was a trap door at the top of a flight of steps. It was a section of the flooring above, sawed out and hinged. It was so heavy that even a strong man couldn't lift it in wet weather, when it warped a little.

The main floor of the Kitchen Part was chiefly occupied by one of the largest kitchens I have ever seen. Big Flurry had been reared in a house that was characterized by lack of space. His women should have plenty of room for cooking. The kitchen was a vast expanse of floor and walls.

A partition was run across from north to south, cutting off ten feet at the east. This was unequally divided into a bedroom and a very large pantry, called a but'ry for some strange reason that I never fully understood.

So there was now a house of four bedrooms, dining room, parlor, and kitchen; seven rooms, not counting the but'ry, cellar, attic, hall, and closets. Big Flurry had become a landed proprietor with a manse of no mean proportions.

The farm buildings included a stable for six horses, a corncrib for two thousand bushels, a granary for almost unlimited storage of wheat or shelled corn, an implement shed, a chicken house, various cattle and hog sheds, and a two-hole privy.

Chicken house, implement shed and privy were salvage, bought at a bargain through the ever-trusted Pat Whaley. The shelter in which grain drill, McCormick reaper and cornplanter were kept was known as the shanty. It had been a jerry-built store in Wichita, and had no front doors. But its back was to the north, and it served its purpose fairly well.

The chicken house was a cabin, also moved out from town, and was unsatisfactory to the chickens. They deserted it, eventually, and went to roost in the apple trees.

[1860-1865]

The privy and chicken house must have come from the same salvage lot, for they both showed signs of having been painted with a substantial, bright red paint. The privy was set up at the bottom of the hill, to the west of the house. Vines were planted around it to give it a discreet atmosphere. It was used by the women of the family, but never by the men or boys except in case of desperate illness.

Only about half of the Valley demesne was under cultivation at any time during the Driscoll proprietorship. A fringe of woodland bordered the Arkansas River on the east. This was sandy land, and the new owner judged properly that it would be worthless for crops. He fenced it in, including a foreland of light soil to be used as pasture. In this section of the farm the cattle were allowed to live and make a living, if they could. The woodland was a delight for growing boys, covered with ancient trees and newer trees, and under all a thick growth of brush.

Big Flurry believed in trees. He planted thousands of them during his time in the Valley, and transplanted to the yard some fine sycamores, already well grown, to shade and protect the house.

He was known as a good farmer. He loved the soil, and could make it produce the most it was capable of producing. He labored prodigiously, and expected everybody else to do likewise. He could not abide weeds. His rows were always as straight as though they had been laid out by a surveyor.

But he was a bit slack in what the modern agriculturists call animal husbandry. We may come upon instances and conditions that will illustrate this circumstance.



*When Big Flurry built or planted, his chief thought was of permanence.*

*In building his house, he used much heavier timbers than were required. Everything was reinforced and braced against wind and weather, far more than the carpenters and builders recommended.*

*In the years during which his family was growing up in that house, the Old Man often sat under the trees or walked around, looking at gables and eaves and roofs.*

*When he could get anybody to listen, he was wont to say, "There's timbers in that house that nobody can see but me."*

*Gateposts and fences he built to last forever. He conserved the forest as though he were going to live with it a thousand years. He planted the slowest-growing trees in his middle age, because he had learned that only such trees would last.*

*He did not like new furniture. Rather, he would have old chairs and tables of solid walnut, and heavy, because they would last through generations.*

*In his early years of building, he must have thought that some of his children would continue to occupy the farm home, and some of his grandchildren, too. He was disappointed as one after another of his children turned eyes away from the farm, looking for life that had in it less drudgery and more beauty.*

*But still he builded for the generations. He knew no other way.*

## 6

KATHERINE, third child and second daughter of Big Flurry and his wife, known as Katie from babyhood, died when she was nearly twelve years old. As I was little more than a year old at the time, I have no remembrance of her or of her death. She died of typhoid and bad doctoring. The latter element was present in all our frontier ailments during those early years. A quack doctor gave Katie calomel and lemon juice as a specific for typhoid.

Stephen I remember only in connection with his death, though I was nearly three and a half years old at the time of his passing. He came home from school one bitter day in March with a bad cold. Pneumonia developed rapidly. In a few days the boy was delirious with fever. His bed was in the dining room, beside the stove, so that the March wind, whistling its chilly message of doom through the rattling window frames, could be tempered for the father's favorite son.

The doctor in this case was a faker who was destined to become notorious throughout the world as a prosperous exploiter of the nation's craze for dietary fads. He lived to a fabulous old age by the simple device of never prescribing for himself. At the time of Stephen's illness, this mountebank was an obscure practitioner in Wichita.

The doctor ordered a hot bath for the child, who was very weak from long-continued fever. A galvanized iron tub was brought into the dining room, placed in front of the stove, which was kept red-hot by constant feeding of dry wood. Water was heated here and on the kitchen stove.

The medical man ordered the sinking patient immersed in the

tub. He and Big Flurry picked up the boy and thrust him into the scalding water.

Stephen struggled in mute protest against this murderous therapy. The pompous quack, his authority challenged, looked at his watch and repeated the order: "Keep him in the water."

"Take me out of here!" cried the suffering child.

"Hold him another minute!" said the medico.

When they laid him on the bed, the lad was dead.

Outside, the cold wind howled and hard snowflakes beat against the windows. Big Flurry, like the bereaved King Lear, out-howled the elements, cursed the storms of heaven, and raved against any authority that presumed to kill his darling son while snakes and robbers lived in health.

At once, he blamed himself as sole cause of the boy's death, grudgingly dividing the responsibility with God. Falling upon his knees, bellowing in indescribable expression of exquisite despair, he begged the inanimate corpse to forgive him for holding the dear child roughly in the tub of steaming water. He kissed the cooling cheeks of his son, roaring the while against God and himself for their joint heartlessness.

Strangely enough, he never blamed or rebuked the so-called physician. Years had passed since Big Flurry had knocked out the dentist in Erie for alleged malpractice.

"Sure it wasn't his bye, but me own," wailed the heartbroken Irishman. "I killed me own fine bye. 'Take me out of here!' says he, the only sassy word he ever spoke to me. And I held him in the hot wather and killed him. . . . Oh, Mother of God, why do you let me live and murder me fine son, me darling, me darling bye!"

The funeral was awful. I was too young to know much about what was going on. But on the day of the funeral, when the coffin in the parlor was about to be closed, Dad carried me in among the mourners.

He leaned down, held me out toward the calm face of the sleeping child, and cried, "Kiss him now, kiss your brother before he goes under the ground!"

So saying, he let out a yell that scared everybody in the house



and in the yard, and frightened me out of my proper wits. I do not know whether I kissed the dead face. I do know that I have avoided viewing the corpses of dead friends and relatives ever since, and that funerals give me the jitters.

Big Flurry silenced all weeping with his roaring. He talked as he wept, he called down the vengeance of Heaven upon himself, who, he swore, was, with God, alone responsible for the death of the boy. He cried to the neighbors and friends to shoot him, to put him into jail, and to ostracize him from civilized society, all the time calling God to witness that he was a murderer and that he had loved his son passing well.

Never did Big Flurry enter that parlor of his own volition again. When he was obliged to come into the room, he kept his hat in his hand and averted his eyes from the spot where his dead son had lain.

They could not induce me to accompany the family to the funeral. I had been so frightened by my father's unearthly bawling that I ran out the back door and played by myself on the rockpile east of the house. To all inducements I turned a deaf ear, and I hid in the crevices of the rockpile when they tried to catch me.

Clara Bradshaw, a good-natured, freckled woman of the neighborhood, volunteered to stay and care for me. I watched the assembling of the carriages, buggies, hacks and hearse. The waving black plumes, splendid regalia and prancing black horses impressed me with the majesty of death and its pageantry. I saw them slide into the hearse the box that contained my brother, and thought what a fine thing it was to get a ride like that, especially since Mother had told me that Stephen, having been a good boy, was going straight to heaven.

When the mourners returned, I asked whether they had accompanied Stephen to heaven. Mother explained with much simplification that it was necessary first to place him down in the earth, but that he took flight directly to God.

I slept on it, and dreamed of the hearse, with all its panoply, driving down into a great pit in the ground, and then driving up again, and up and up and up a moonbeam or a roadway of light, to the very gates of heaven. The gates were just like the gates at the altar

rail in church, only taller. Here, Stephen arose from the big box and walked in, being greeted by Jesus, who wore a crown of thorns, as in the picture in our parlor. There was plenty of candy, and no choir music, because choir music made me sad.

I have never got rid of that dream. Throughout my life, from that funeral night, it recurs at irregular intervals, sometimes with gruesome details, but always with the chill fear that affected me when my father bawled so loud in my ear as I stooped to kiss Stephen.

Neither of the parents ceased mourning the loss of their son, so long as they lived. Years after the tragedy, Big Flurry would burst into violent weeping upon mention of the boy's name. In his more reflective moments he would speak of "little Stevie" and what a fine farmer he would be now, if only he had been spared.

Mother put his school things, his old toys from babyhood, and his scrapbook, into the bottom drawer of her bureau, where already were Katie's hood and school books. There was the slate upon which Stevie had prepared his last lesson. It must be preserved just that way, and the slate must never be used by anybody. Here were his books, here the lessons he started to study when his last illness was upon him.

We were not permitted to open that drawer. But on a long afternoon, when the family was away, Mother would sometimes sit on the floor before the bureau and invite me to sit beside her. She would take out the treasures, one by one, and go over the history of each of them with me. Yes, and she would spring Stevie's jack-in-the-box for me just once. No, not again. The spring might wear out.

There was a sled, a roughly home-made contraption, which Stephen had put together for the last snow. It was kept under the south porch, and once or twice a year was hauled out for dusting and meditations. It remained there until it fell to pieces. But Mother was withering by that time, too, and did not miss the sled.

A rod southwest of the south porch was a little plot, perhaps five feet square, where Stephen had planted and tended a garden of his own. It was kept as a memorial flower garden. With her own hands, at sundown, Mother would pull the weeds and stir up the soil around the roses and lilies she had planted there. On scorching

summer nights, when crops were blowing away on the hot wind, she would carry water to "Stevie's garden" and protect it with water-soaked gunnysacks. After an illness, when she had been near a reunion with the lost children, she would totter out to Stevie's garden in the evening. I often saw her there, on her knees, praying.

Dad sat at the east end of the dining table. Up to Stephen's death, Mother had sat at the opposite end. At about that time, I was ready for a place at the table. But instead of putting me in the place where Stephen had sat, I was seated at the foot of the table, and Mother moved over one location to the right, next to Stephen's place.

Stephen's plate was set at the table and his empty chair pulled up. Meals had always been quiet, almost solemn. Now they became more sad, for Mother often looked at the vacant space at her right, smiling, as if about to speak to the person there, and then burst into tears.

It was incomprehensible to me that Mother should grieve so for the dead son, in view of the fact, which she often reiterated, that he was much better off with God and the saints in heaven than he could possibly be here on earth, with wet feet in cold winter weather.

Mother liked to have me read aloud to her. Much practice at this gave me training that was invaluable in later life, when I went in for public speaking.

I liked to read the maudlin, sentimental, tear-jerking poems that were as popular then as the groaning and sighing, moaning and grunting of radio singers are today. I would read selections from the school readers of my older brothers and sisters, when Mother and I were alone.

"Death of Little Paul" and "Death of Little Nell," which perverse publishers had put into the readers to make the children cry at school, drew no tears from me, but I loved their bathos. It gave me my chance to be dramatic.

There was a poem about "Somebody's Darling." It began:

Into the ward of the whitewashed walls,  
Where the dead and dying lay,  
Wounded by bayonets, shells, and balls,  
Somebody's Darling was borne one day.

It went on through pages of mush about the soldier and his distant mother.

This poem I could render from memory. Mother sat in the sunshine of a spring day, on the back porch, and asked me to recite. I went into my act. As usual, she was crying bitterly at the end of the second stanza.

I paused. "I'll quit if you want me to," I said. "I don't want to make you cry."

"No, go on. I like to hear it."

"But if you liked it you wouldn't cry. Nobody likes anything that makes them cry. Are you thinking about Stephen?"

"Yes. But I like to think about my darling."

"You said he was in heaven with God, and that that is a nicer place than this farm."

"Yes, yes, that's true."

"Well, why don't we get God to send him back? I think He would do it. You say yourself that He always answers prayers. You and I could pray to Him right now, and if He didn't send Stephen right away, we'd ask the Blessed Virgin. She would speak to God about it, because she couldn't want to see you crying so much."

"No, even if God should offer to send Stephen back to me today, I would not want it to be. He is happy in his heavenly home, and it would be sinful even to wish to have him back here."

This stumped me. The logic of the situation escaped me completely.

Mother and both daughters wore deep mourning for several years after Stephen's death. Then Grandma Brown died, and Mother went into the deepest mourning, with long black veil, for several more years.



*It may be that a man becomes unreasonably jealous of his children, as they take more and more of his wife's time and attention. But some men, in a futile bitterness that often creeps in with middle age, say that a woman loses interest in her husband and in love, as soon as she has borne all the children she wants or is likely to have.*

*About this I do not know even as much as the poor, helpless doctors, ministers and radio experts who try to straighten out the tangled coils of family troubles, while, so often, their own home lives are piling upon rocks.*

*Mother and Dad were working hard. Maybe there is such a thing as working too hard.*

*Both had in view the making of a home and the rearing of a family. But they had varying ideas about life and how it should be lived.*

*When Himself brought home six solid, new kitchen chairs, Mother put them in the kitchen, and discarded the worn-out chairs that had been in use there.*

*Big Flurry was furious. He spilled his soup and threw one of the old chairs at an inoffensive cat in the back yard.*

*He thought the chairs that he had bought should go into the parlor, because they were new, and that the parlor chairs should be shifted to the dining room, dining-room chairs to the kitchen. He could not understand the depraved nature of a woman who would use new chairs in the kitchen.*

*Misunderstandings were piling up, and I, an uncomprehending small boy, was filled with apprehensions.*

By the time I was seven, an age at which children begin to take a more objective view of their environment and to size up situations, Mother was forty-two, and Dad was fifty-six. Mother's health was beginning to crack under the strain of child-bearing, child-burying, hard work, worry and a growing strain in her relations with Himself.

My early remembrances of Mother picture her in the dead black costume with mourning veil on Sundays, and going about the house with a wet cloth tied around her head on other days.

She was at this time, and for several years, subject to migraine, or sick headaches. Now and again these attacks would strike her down, and she would remain in bed for two or three days. Marie would minister to her. But Mother required few ministrations. She wanted the water in the basin beside the bed changed from time to time, to keep it cool. She dipped clean linen or cotton cloths into it and applied them to her forehead and eyes. We children were asked to be quiet in the house.

But the noise of a mowing machine in the fields, the lowing of cattle, and especially the sound of a sickle being sharpened on the grindstone in the barnyard, would drive the patient frantic with pain. And such noises could not be suppressed.

Big Flurry had begun sleeping in the bedroom off the kitchen, on the first floor. John and Florence occupied the west bedroom upstairs, Marie and Margaret the east bedroom. Mother occupied the big bed in the main bedroom, and I slept in a small bed in the same room.

There were illnesses in the family from time to time. I suffered

from croup from babyhood until I was twelve years old, and twice had pneumonia in a severe form. During my earliest battle with pneumonia, I was a mere baby. The doctor in this case appears to have been a little less incompetent than the ones who had attended to most of our ailments.

Mother had the idea that she could keep the baby warmer and more comfortable by holding him in her lap. She sat up every night, all night. The doctor warned her that she must get rest or pay heavy damages. She continued her vigil. As the crisis seemed about to develop, she took the baby in her arms and held him, to make him well by her devotion and constancy.

For three days and three nights she held the baby, never putting him down until the doctor said he was past the crisis and would get well. He did, but the mother never got well. A paralysis of intestinal muscles resulted from the long vigil, and was never cured. With what a price that baby was purchased from Death!

A change of name is here to be noted. Florence, who did not like his name after he learned that most Florences are girls, was nicknamed Van in boyhood. To avoid confusion later, we'll adopt the nickname now, for as Van he has been known in the family throughout life.

Van came out of his babyhood trouble. He had a head larger than most men, but he eventually grew up to it, and even appeared to make a good job of filling the large head with useful knowledge. In boyhood, however, he stuttered, and was nervous. He was afraid of high places. He was occasionally ill.

No doctor was ever called for my croup. The emergency was so immediate that it had to be taken care of instantly. To get a doctor, someone had to drive to Wichita. An hour, at least, would be consumed in getting to the doctor's office. Then the doctor had to be induced to drop all other cases, get his horses harnessed and hitched up, and start out on the road for the home of the sick person.

Never did we call a doctor in any case until the patient was in desperate condition. Three hours would be the shortest reasonable prospect for medical aid. Croup requires treatment, often drastic, at the moment. The patient is choking and you must give him relief.



When I came in from outdoor play, or, later, from school, with a husky voice, the fat was literally on the fire. Fat salt pork was put into a pan and shoved into the oven. Mother and Marie went into action. They knew that if I had a husky voice at five o'clock I would be gasping for breath by seven o'clock.

I was placed in a big chair beside the dining-room stove, my feet in a pail of hot water, liberally reinforced with freshly ground mustard. On top of the stove, some baleful concoction was kept simmering, and every few minutes a cupful of this would be forced down my throat.

Meantime, the supreme torture was being prepared. A patch of cheesecloth, big enough to cover my chest from port to starboard and from stem to stern, was cut out with scissors. A liberal handful of ground mustard, mixed with boiling water, was spread upon the cheesecloth. Another square of cheesecloth was added, and you had a plaster, steaming-hot and a quarter of an inch thick. This was slapped upon my bare chest.

My skin was as thin and tender as any girl's. Besides, it had been cooked with these terrible poultices since early fall. By spring the skin had blistered and peeled a dozen times, and I was scarcely able to bear the weight of the lightest garment on it. A fiery throbbing of the tortured surface went forward day and night.

Now upon this sore chest the fires of hell were unloosed. I screamed when I saw the smoking poultice coming, held in Mother's two hands. I was admonished, scolded, denounced, for my cowardice, and, above my screams, there sounded the solemn warning that I would choke to death before midnight unless I stopped bawling and submitted quietly to treatment. Screaming and crying made the croup worse.

Mother suggested that I repeat a certain formula which had never failed to give her comfort in affliction:

All for Thee, Sweet Jesus, all for Thee;  
Jesus suffered more than this for me.

I resented this invidious comparison of suffering. I bawled, "The Jews never put such hot plasters on Jesus!"

This was denounced as blasphemy, and I was warned that if I should be so unlucky as to die with that sin on my soul, I should go where mustard plasters would be considered a relief from real burning. I howled the louder, and in choking voice, scarcely audible, asked to be permitted to go to hell and try it. These irreligious outbursts in time of emergency were shocking to my family. Next day, when I was entirely well, except for a sore chest, I was advised to say the rosary in reparation for my sacrilege of the previous night.

As soon as the mustard plaster was anchored in place, and a guard posted to hold my hands and see that I didn't lift the burning blanket off, another poultice was built for the neck. Into a bandage of cheesecloth the fat salt pork, now sizzling in the oven, was laid. Genuine cayenne pepper was added by the handful. This supreme instrument of torture was wound around my neck, the while my screaming became less and less audible, due to the almost complete drowning of the vocal cords in phlegm.

All this time, I was wrapped around with three or four heavy wool blankets, the hot mustard water in the pail was frequently renewed, and I was drenched at intervals with the concoction on top of the stove. One member of the family was told off to feed the fire with dry sticks of wood, and keep the sides of the stove red-hot.

Usually, not even a common cold resulted from an attack of croup. I would have fallen asleep from exhaustion about four o'clock in the morning. By noon of that day, my voice would be as good as new, and I would be meditating upon my sins of the previous night, and asking permission to go out and play in the snow.

A few medals of the Blessed Virgin and the saints who happened to be popular at the moment were always hung on a piece of grocery string about my neck. Aunt Fannie had supplied one that she said was particularly efficacious in warding off croup. There were three or four medals, in different sizes and styles, dedicated to Our Lady of Victory, and supplied by Father Baker, of Buffalo, New York, to whom Mother was greatly devoted.

On the day after a heavy bout with the enemy, I would go poking about the house, collecting more medals. There were always

some lying in the dresser drawers, the sewing machine drawers, or in the kitchen cupboard. I added a few, hoping to escape the extreme penalty for my many sins when next the croup should strike. I had a pair of woolen scapulars, filthy beyond compare, that I had been wearing for a year or more, next to my skin. Also an Agnus Dei, or wax tablet stamped with the traditional symbol of the Lamb of God, on a cord. It was about as dirty as anything could become from sweat and dirt and plasters on the chest.

I jingled like a reindeer when I went about the school grounds, and the heathen made fun of me. They asked me whether I won all those medals for worshipping the Pope; but I warned them that they would go to hell for their sacrilege, and they generally believed me, for they had a conviction of sin and a monumental faith in hell fire.

George Leonard, who was about my age, but much stronger, was one of the most persistent scoffers. He pointed out, with some color of logic, that I had more croup than almost anybody else, despite the load of holy objects I carried about with me.

The answer to that was not far to seek. Yes, I admitted that I had croup oftener than anyone in school, except George. He was my only rival for the grand prize as croupmaster of the Valley. George wore no medals, but his mother was the most notable shouter in the United Brethren Church. Why didn't her shouting for Jesus stop George's croup, if it was the true and accepted act of worship of God and His saints?

Furthermore, I pointed out, George's mother made him drink a cup of his own urine every time he got an attack of croup, and vainly had tried to get Mother to use the same magic on me. I declared that we were not so uncivilized as to drink our own urine or run all over a church, shouting for Jesus.

This argument, pursued before a jury of a dozen or more boys, usually led to a fight. George whipped me every time except one. In that fight I ran so fast that George couldn't catch me. Just as he was giving up the pursuit, I paused, picked up a piece of muddy board with a rusty nail in it, and flung the object at my enemy. The nail plowed a bloody furrow clear down one side of George's

face, and my tormentor carried the scar to his grave, many years later.

Thus did we resolve important questions of faith, morals, and therapeutics in our country school.

Wet feet in winter seemed to be an infallible prescription for acquiring croup, or at least a bad cold. My feet were always wet when there was snow or rain, because there was no way of keeping them dry.

John and Dad had rubber boots for farm work in wet weather. These were black, and were known as gum boots. They were so expensive that the favorite phrase of reassurance in our part of the world was, "You bet your gum boots!" It took the place of "You bet your life."

The gum boots each had two loops of heavy rubber at the top. It took a bit of doing to get them on without tearing them or separating the sole from the boot. The soft rubber of which they were made wouldn't leak, but that was its only virtue. The feet became extremely cold in this encasement, in winter. They poured forth immense quantities of sweat in mild or warm weather. In summer, it was much better to go barefooted during wet weather, and that was what most men and boys did.

John and Dad had leather boots, too. Getting these on and off was a struggle, but did not endanger the structure of the boots. These foot containers were, like the rubber ones, about knee-length, but they were built to last till Doomsday. Of cowhide, heavily reinforced at strategic points, with leather loops a half-inch wide for pulling on, they were the sturdier forerunners of the boots worn today by real cowmen in the Southwest.

These boots were almost waterproof. The owners kept them in good condition by rubbing neatsfoot oil into them every Saturday night. Dad made bootjacks out of stout oak scantlings. One of these was available always in the kitchen, one in each bedroom occupied by a man, and two or three spare bootjacks were to be found in the granary, corncrib and stable. It was impossible to remove the boots without a bootjack.

Dad had also a pair of dress boots, of highly polished Cordovan

leather, quite as effeminate as anything worn by the make-believe cowboys of today's movies. These were Big Flurry's wedding boots. I seldom saw him wearing them. He kept them under his bed, and oiled them meticulously twice a year.

When we boys needed shoes, Dad would cry out, "For the love of God, Wooman, more shoes, is it?"

"Sure, 'tis only the other day that I brought home a pair of shoes from Tom Lynch's store for each of them. All right if you say 'tis three months, there lave it. Three months, in the Name of God! Sorra the day! Sure, God knows that knows me heart, I have a pair of boots in there that has lasted me these thirty years! And as good as new they are today. Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh! So I must be bringing home more shoes, to kape the docther away."

Then would come a lecture on doctors, doctor bills, and the folly of hiring doctors for any purpose. If the occasion seemed to warrant a full dress performance, Big Flurry would work himself up into a towering rage, and dance about, chanting:

"'Tis the throt of the docthor's harse  
Keeps me scratching a beggar's arsel!"

This was extremely effective when repeated in a wild sing-song for a few minutes.

After such a demonstration, he would rush out, hitch up a team, and make for Wichita. When he returned, there would be shoes, and, in all likelihood, a five-cent bag of hard candy.

The shoes bought for the younger boys at Tom Lynch's store were of inferior material and workmanship, and invariably ill-fitting. Mother maintained that they were made in the penitentiary. I believe some state prisons did, in those days, operate shoe factories that sold in the open market, in competition with legitimate manufacturers.

We sometimes drew two shoes for the same foot, in a highly decorative pasteboard box. Frequently, there were nails protruding through the soles, on the inside, making it impossible to get the shoe on a foot. Most of these shoes would crumple up and come apart when they were worn in wet weather.

All were button shoes, and reached above the ankles. The buttons were set into the leather in nondescript fashion until the shoes had been tried on. A chalk line was drawn down the side of the shoe on the first fitting, showing where the buttons should go. Then the shoes were taken back to the store, and young Charlie Lynch would clinch the buttons in the proper line, with a clinching machine that was operated by foot power, in the rear of the salesroom.

After the buttons were clinched, no further appeal was possible. I had small feet, but high arches and insteps. Nearly always, the buttons were set in such a line that those over the instep could never be buttoned. Charlie Lynch, viewing the chalk line on the leather, simply refused to believe that any boy could be cursed with such a high instep. He put the buttons where he believed God had intended them to be.

Charlie Lynch and his red-haired sister, Agnes, who sang in the choir in our church, were my godparents. Agnes died before I was old enough to know much about her. She seemed to me a surpassingly beautiful young woman. Hearing that she was my godmother, I assumed that she was somehow related to God, and behaved toward her with the awe and reverence that obviously were due to a relative of God's.

For Charlie, on the other hand, I had only contempt. He was the good-looking young man who made my feet hurt, and the story that he was my godfather never impressed me as being at all truthful.

Charlie sometimes forgot to clinch all the buttons. Those not clinched would pop out on the first day of wear. Then I would have to stay at home from school until somebody went to town and got the buttons properly set in the shoes.

John and the two girls acquired overshoes for wet and snowy weather. These were heavy, rubber-soled, canvas shoes, somehow waterproofed. They were lined with red flannel fleece, and fastened in front with one, two, or three buckles. They were awkward to wear, but generally kept the feet more or less dry. They were called arctics, always pronounced artics in our household. When I learned, in adolescence, that artic was an improper pronunciation, I was humiliated beyond expression. But I lived to learn that a goodly

proportion of the nation's population calls the polar regions the arctic, and I have ceased to blush for my family's mispronunciation.

We boys, having no overshoes or gum boots, had wet feet throughout the snow-and-slush periods of winter. Colds, continuous snuffles, fevers, grip, thickened nasal tissues and diseased tonsils were a few of the inevitable results of this condition. We missed many weeks of school every winter on account of colds or lack of proper clothing for the really bitter weather that is characteristic of Kansas in winter.

During most of the winter, it was impossible to go out of doors without getting wet feet. Thaws were even more frequent than snows. If you stayed indoors all day, nursing a sore throat, and went out in the evening to milk the cows, you came in with wet feet.

The customary procedure was to dry the shoes on your feet by sticking them into the oven of the kitchen stove.

When no baking was going forward, the oven was used for drying out green or wet wood, to make it fit to burn in the stove. You sat in a chair in front of the oven, opened the oven door, and cocked your wet feet, fully shod, up on the pile of wood in the oven. You were supposed to see to it that the drying-out process was gradual. But your feet were cold and wet. They couldn't wait an hour and a half before getting some relief.

The inevitable result, all too frequently, was that you didn't move your feet until you felt the sting of sudden heat and smelled burning leather. Then it was too late to save the shoes. New or old, they were ruined. Once they got smoking-hot, the life was out of the leather. Next morning would find them full of cracks, falling apart. This happened again and again. Scoldings, whippings, and days in bed were good punishments, but did little to correct the evil of the smoking shoes.

Perhaps a pair of overshoes would have been a good investment for both of us. But my parents were not much concerned about investments. The present cost was all, because it loomed so big.

When we could afford it, we boys wore fleece-lined underclothes. This meant union suits, long in arms and legs, gray in color, pure cotton throughout, with an inner surface, when new, of fleecy white

cotton, which gave the illusion of warmth the first time you wore it, because it was soft.

In the first washing in our hard water, the loose cotton in the lining wadded up into knots, balls, cubes and clods. These suits were so cold and uncomfortable that I was always glad when I learned that all my underclothes were worn out and I should have to finish the winter without any.

There was a time, when I was very young, when almost our entire family had red woolen underclothes in winter. This outfit of luxurious clothing must have been some sort of heirloom, for the long red woolens were cut down for the younger boys when they had become too threadbare for further wear by the elders, and eventually the last shred of the warm stuff passed out of use, except as rags in the great rag-bag that served so many household purposes. These red rags made fine shoe polishers.

Mother's genius for dressmaking was a blessing of great power in our home. She could make any kind of garment for anybody. She made all the clothing for the children until they were of school age, and most of it afterwards. She made my waists, and then my shirts. Her own clothes and the girls' dresses and coats were mostly her handiwork.

When the girls were in their teens, Mother made for each of them a warm winter coat of chinchilla cloth. When they had outgrown these, after at least three winters, Mother cut the coats down, re-styled them, and made overcoats for Van and me. These were among the best winter garments either of us has ever worn.

The old Davis sewing machine was a primitive thing, bought second-hand and often out of order. Now, Mother knew Thomas Shaw, who advertised daily in the *Wichita Eagle* with a picture of himself, in a wide-flowing mustache. The legend that went with the one-column full-face picture, said: "Thomas Shaw, the Music Man of Wichita." Mr. Shaw wanted Mother to buy a new, modern sewing machine at his store. He sold musical instruments, but sewing machines paid the rent.

Mr. Shaw would trust Mother for the price of the machine, knowing that she could soon make enough money with it to pay for it.



Mother would not take the machine without a substantial amount of cash as an initial payment. So she made a dress for Mrs. Martin, two dresses for the Martin daughters, and three or four party dresses for our city friends, charging three to five dollars each for the jobs, depending upon the amount of labor involved.

Then she went to the Music Man and picked out a Union sewing machine with golden oak framework and stand, and a box to fit over the machine head. This box looked like a baby's coffin, was of golden oak, lettered in gold with the word Union. There were three drawers on each side, each opening with a nickeled pull-ring. The new purchase was about the last word in sewing machines. In fact, few improvements were made in the machinery itself until motors were put to work in place of foot-power, many years later.

The woodwork of the machine was jerry-built, and soon became dilapidated. As the glue dried up with household heat, the drawers started falling apart. But the machine itself ran on and on, day and night, summer and winter. Mother did so much work with it that her eyesight was seriously affected. She made dresses for everybody. Her customers came to her from word-of-mouth advertising.

Marie was a constant help in the dressmaking, as well as in housework, berry-picking, and caring for the family. Mother taught the eldest daughter how to use a pattern, how to cut cloth, and how to turn a seam. That knowledge and skill meant earthly salvation for the daughter, many years later.

*There were interludes of pleasant peacefulness. There were times when it seemed to us children that Mother and Dad had made up their differences, and that all would be well.*

*Still, there were other worries. Sin, hell fire, and the devil loomed threateningly.*

*For even small sins one might have to go to purgatory and burn in fire hotter than any fire in the kitchen stove, for years and years. I used to touch the hottest part of the stove that my hand could bear, and go away crying. The family thought I was crying because I had burnt my hand. The tears were only an expression of my terror at the idea that this small burn was as nothing compared with the fires of purgatory, where even nice people went.*

*I worried a good deal about this, and fairly screamed when I realized that even Mother, good and devout as she was, might have to spend some time in hot fire for her sins.*

*The devil was constantly tempting a fellow. Sometimes when I tore my clothes or talked back to Mother, I was told that I was a branch and would never come to any good.*

*A branch meant that one was a part of the devil himself, or a sort of representative of Satan in this world. Considering my impetuous temper and my habit of talking back, I thought it not unlikely that I was really a branch; and this was a worry.*

*How could a branch ever escape hell?*

## 8

HIMSELF loved babies, and he had a gentle hand for them. When a neighbor would come visiting, carrying a baby, Big Flurry, coming in from the field on a hot day, would wash up, change to a fresh shirt, and ask to hold the infant. Cuddling the little one in his arms, he would walk with it, talk with it, and sing a crooning Irish lullaby. The babies all took to him, played with his whiskers, and were happy.

After playing with the baby until his work conscience hurt him severely, he would hand it back, with some such expression as this: "Well, Misthress Balch, 'tis a fine bye you have here, and may God spare him to you. He looks like his father, and 'tis himself is no basthard. I'm best be getting back to me harses now. Good-day to you, Mam."

I recall one occasion on which Dad took care of me for an evening when the rest of the family was absent. It was a big night at Literary Society, and the girls urged Mother to go along, since she knew all those who would be taking part, and would enjoy their performances.

"Let ye all go," volunteered the Old Man. "I'll look afther the little fellow, and a fine time we'll have, too."

So they were off in the spring wagon, John driving. Literary Society had been organized by the teacher at Riverside School, and included most of the young farmers and their wives, as well as some of the older school pupils, in its membership. It met at the U. B. Church when that structure could be had. Tonight there was to be a debate between Steve Balch and John Leonard on the subject, "Resolved: that the country is a better place to live than the city."

The audience was to take part in the discussion after the champions had presented their arguments, and the winner would be determined by a vote of the members of the Literary Society. There had been some exciting meetings of late, and a free-for-all fight was narrowly averted when opponents debated the question: "Resolved: that the pen is mightier than the sword."

Veterans of the War Between the States, in G.A.R. uniforms, objected with patriotic fervor when some young upstarts, just out of rural school, held forth eloquently for the contention that a man with a pen and plenty of ink might win victories more important than those won with a cavalry sabre.

Fun was fun, but if you were to let these young fellows go on talking, no telling what kind of notions they might put into the silly heads of some of the younger ones. The honor of the nation required that youth be brought up to respect killers of rebels and dissenters.

This debate had been the making of the society. The countryside turned out on the coldest nights of winter to sit in the draughty frame church, lighted by coal-oil lamps in wall brackets, and hear the opposing factions tear into one another, with an outside chance that a good fight might develop, either in the church or in the yard. Some of the younger element carried brass knucks and dared those of differing opinions to fight it out behind the church.

The debates often were carried home, and to school, and to picnics or basket suppers. When the discussion got to a point at which one of the contestants called the other a liar, the challenge was flung forth: "All right, I'll meet you at the church-house."

It became noised about the neighborhood that Harve Loner and Amos Hanson, cousins, were going to meet at the church-house. On the following Sunday night, after meeting, the two contestants retired to the open space at the rear of the church. Friends of the opponents ranged around in a large circle, holding coal-oil lanterns. A few buggies with headlights were driven into the fringe of the circle, to help furnish light.

Amos and Harve were evenly matched as to weight and age;

about 175 pounds each, about 20 years old. Amos was heavier in shoulders and back, but had a shorter reach.

The two stood in the center of the cleared space, looking at the ground, whittling. Occasionally there would come a mild urging from the crowd: "Go after him, Amos!" or "Hit 'im, Harve!" But for the most part, the crowd was silent.

After glancing about to make sure that the crowd was assembled, Amos spoke, in a low tone:

"So you called me a liar."

Harve was silent, whittling steadily.

"Are you goin' to take it back?"

Long silence. Then Harve, clearing his throat, "No, I ain't."

Amos snaps his knife shut and sticks the whittling stick into his hip pocket. He peels off his coat and rolls up his sleeves. Harve does likewise. The two stand for a moment, toe to toe, glaring at each other.

Amos swings a powerful blow to Harve's chest. Harve returns the blow to his opponent's chest, as hard as he can.

Neither attempts to defend himself. Here is no feinting, guarding or dodging.

Both boys are right-handed, so the blows generally land in the cardiac region. The exchange seldom becomes fast. The boys depend upon impact, rather than speed.

There is no formal division of the fight into rounds. But when one or both begin breathing very hard, indicating exhaustion, both swing their arms to their sides, back away a couple of feet, and start whittling again. Nothing is said for a few minutes.

"You got enough?" says Amos.

No answer. But in a half minute Harve remarks, looking intently at his whittling, "Your old dad is a damn fool, too."

Snap, goes Amos's jackknife. Snap, goes Harve's. They are at it again, slugging and being slugged. The fight might last an hour or more. Generally, one of the opponents would start spitting blood. Then, by common consent, the fight was off, and was considered a draw.

In later years I witnessed some of these literary battles of the giants, but I didn't know about them on the night when the family went to the debate and left me with Dad. I enjoyed the prospect immensely.

I sat in my baby chair beside Himself in his big chair, at the kitchen stove. Dad told me stories of his youth, of the beatings he got from the teacher when he went to school, and of the horse's skull he had to drag home with him at night and back to school in the morning, because he couldn't seem to learn to spell.

In return, I told stories of my many adventures, imagined on the moment, and boasted passionately of my prowess in chasing cattle.

Big Flurry fixed me a slab of bread-and-butter-and-sugar, which I consumed while he sang Irish songs. When I became drowsy in my chair, he took me in his arms and sang low, wailing, sad Gaelic lullaby songs.

There was a repetitious song of the Bantry Bay country, celebrating the days when gossips spread the news that the French were coming to help Ireland fight the English for freedom. It had many stanzas, a monotonous refrain, seemingly composed for the one job of putting a tired baby to sleep. It went something like this:

Oh, the French are on the way,  
Says the Shan Vaughan Vogt,  
They'll be here without delay,  
Says the Shan Vaughan Vogt,  
Oh, the French are on the Bay,  
Says the Shan Vaughan Vogt,  
They'll be landing here today,  
Says the Shan Vaughan Vogt,  
Oh, the French are on the sea,  
Says the Shan Vaughan Vogt,  
And Auld Ireland will be free,  
Says the Shan Vaughan Vogt.

With the stubborn determination of a baby that refuses to go to sleep because it is enjoying life, I kept my eyes open during all of this, and much more. But when I began to relax, Big Flurry's

rumbling bass voice began an organ chant that sounded like this, as nearly as I can represent it on paper:

Shée-ee-eee-den-show,  
Uh shée-ee-eee-den-show;  
Uh hung-gone low,  
Un a shée-ee-ee-den-show.

The songs are not guaranteed as to accuracy. They are merely impressions, remaining in memory after more than half a century.

When the family returned, I was sound asleep, but Himself was up, proud of his job of nursery maid, and boasting how he and the little fellow had got on so well. Steve Balch had destroyed his adversary in the debate as to relative merits of town and country by quoting the proverb, "God made the country; man made the town."

Everyone knew that Steve didn't believe in God. But that made his argument the stronger with the audience. Here was the Valley's most noted infidel calling upon the Name of God to win his point! Cheers and stamping of feet greeted the sally.

His opponent tried to come back by arguing that when man made the town he had behind him all the experience that God had piled up in making the country, and that sidewalks and paved streets were obviously less likely to give one pneumonia than the mud and puddles of the rural areas. The audience had howled him down, and Steve was proclaimed victor by a roaring viva-voce vote.

As we boys grew older, we learned that bad words were strictly forbidden. We had but little contact with boys outside the family, and so were older than most boys when we began to hear bad words and strange tales of mysteries we had not even guessed at.

We were not permitted to call each other a fool, and the Master Himself was quoted to prove that we would surely go to hell if we should violate this prohibition. But it was customary at times to refer to some very foolish person as "acting like an old F." I had even heard the ladies of our household using this euphemism. Van

sometimes so far forgot himself as to call me a "darn F." Now, darn and darned were forbidden as bad words, and if I told on Van for such an infraction, he would be punished.

Liar was taboo as a direct epithet. It was a point of honor never to permit anybody to call you a liar. In our part of the country, somebody was always shooting somebody else for using that most objectionable term toward him.

However, our elastic ethic permitted us to say, "He's lying. That's a lie. He's lying just exactly like a liar." In our private battles, away from the house, Van and I sometimes called each other liars, but always with the knowledge that it meant a fist fight.

There was a terrible to-do in Wichita because a circus musician, who was a member of our church, had been shot dead by a substantial citizen, allegedly over the passing of the word liar. In the trial of the case, Sam Amidon, a lawyer whom we greatly admired, defended. He was quoted by the press as shouting at the jury, "Do you believe that my client walked into this man's room and calmly said to him, 'You are a liar'?"

This was wonderful drama. I committed the speech to memory. Now I had Van puzzled. I dare not call him a liar without fighting him. But, when I wanted to arouse him to fury, I simply repeated a portion of Amidon's speech, turning to him and shouting the phrase, "You are a liar!" If he hit me, I would report to Mother, "He hit me for nothing. I was just making a speech out of the newspaper, and he was mad because he can't make a speech, so he hit me."

These were difficult cases to adjudicate.

Another subterfuge, to get around the law. We had heard Dad and Mother talk of a mutual acquaintance in Erie named Larry Cain. I applied this name to Van, but changed the Larry to Liar-y in gentle gradations, so that he would not know when to hit me.

It was considered impious to call your brother a monkey. Mother explained to us that we should be thankful that God had not made us monkeys. Having been turned out in the image and likeness of God, it was certainly improper, and perhaps even sinful, to call each other after lower forms of life. Indeed, God could not be blamed



if, in reprisal for such impiety, He should turn us into monkeys some day when He chanced to hear us calling each other monkeys.

"Well," Van would say to me, after such a lecture, "you look like a monkey, anyway. God has probably started making a monkey out of you."

"You look like a liar!" I would retort, in high temper. And the battle would be on again.

Ape was officially declared to be just as bad as monkey. The ruling did not, however, prevent Van from remarking to one of the horses, in my presence, "The other fellow looks something like an ape, doesn't he?"

We rarely called each other by name, but regularly referred to each other as "the other fellow."

I devised a roundelay to sing in Van's presence. I had invented the name Topeater for him, because he had a habit of eating the tops off the soda biscuits, leaving the less crisp lower half in the breadbox for someone else to eat. The roundelay:

Monkey, topeater, ape, monkey, liar;  
That is all they will sing in the choir,  
Except one little melody,  
And I guess that it will be:  
Monkey . . . etc.

This I would chant, emphasizing the liar, until I had my nervous brother half crazy, and he would pitch in with both fists.

The privy was not alluded to as such, but as the littlehouse. Littlehouse was spoken as one word, accenting the little. At times, a visit to the littlehouse was spoken of as "going to Mrs. Jones's."

Bull, boar and stallion were naughty words, and it was considered bad taste to refer to these beasts at all, except in case of necessity. Then the bull was "that animal," "the animal," or "the gentleman cow." The boar was "that big hog" or "the male hog." However, it was best to ignore his existence.

Few farmers owned stallions. Because of the necessity for keeping the strains graded up, thoroughbred stallions were owned by livery stable proprietors, or by enterprising stockmen who boarded

their stallions at livery stables. A fee of from five to twenty-five dollars was paid for service of these horses.

Stallions were advertised throughout the countryside on posters, usually about 18 by 24 inches in size, tacked up on fences, posts and trees along the highways. There was a picture of the horse, his pedigree, the fee asked, and the place where he was at stud. Farmers always referred to a stallion as a stud-horse, ignoring the fact that mares may also be a part of any stud, or collection of blooded horses.

Of course, we boys were not permitted to say stallion or stud-horse in the presence of women, and we had a mild conviction of sin and deviltry when we said those words to each other, away down in the woods. Once I stood on the bank of the river and shouted all the bad words I knew, just as loud as I could.

While Van looked on to see whether I would haply be struck dead, I cupped my hands and yelled:

"Darn stud-horse! Boar! Bull! Liar-ape-monkey! Darn old devil!"

These infamies were not directed at any individual. They were merely tests, to determine what would happen to a person who loudly proclaimed all the obscenities at once.

Nothing happened. But as we went thoughtfully homeward, Van said, "What if somebody had heard you? What if some one of the neighbors was walking along the river bank, looking for wild grapes? What if even a woman had heard you?"

I had thought of that, rather fearfully, myself. But I pretended to be indifferent. "Well, they had no business being there, and besides, any woman would stop up her ears."

Van and I were extremely curious about the wicked stud-horses that were advertised along the highway. One day in summer we decided to go up The Corner to see whether there were any stud-horse pictures there, determined that if there were we would walk right up and read every word on the sheets. The Corner was the crossing of Hydraulic avenue, the north-south section line, with the little-used east-west section line which led to our farm and was dead-ended by the river. The Corner was about half a mile from our door.

It was an adventure to go so far from home, on a public highway, barefooted, without even asking permission. We trotted most of the way.

Sure enough, there, on small boards nailed to hedge trees, at The Corner, were two stud-horse posters! We crossed the road boldly, but agreed that if we should see anybody coming we would duck into underbrush or run for home, lest we be caught reading filthy literature right before the neighbors. Van agreed to stand in the middle of the intersection as scout, and report to me at once if anyone showed up in any direction. I agreed to read aloud to him whatever forbidden words should be found.

One of the stallions was Patchen Wilks. Both the Patch and the Wilks strains were popular in our part of the world, for these horses stood heat and cold well, and were of medium weight. When crossed with heavy draft mares, a tough, healthy horse of medium weight was apt to result.

The other stallion advertised and pictured was Bonnie Boy. I read the advertisements in full in a loud tone, and read them over again when we seemed altogether safe from intrusion. I didn't get the correct pronunciation of Wilks, but got it as a two-syllable word, Willicks.

We were men of the world as we trotted homeward, shouting to each other and to the startled birds in the cottonwood trees along the way, "Patchen Willicks—Bonnie Boy!" Actual names of stud-horses, which we never had dared to pronounce before! It was practically manhood gone wild.

When we reached home, we went about the corners of the house, crying in subdued tones, "Patchen Willicks—Bonnie Boy!" We made it the watchword. In all our make-believe life we had watchwords, which we changed from time to time.

But we carried our wickedness too far. Marie was baking bread in the kitchen. We sat about, whispering from one to the other and back again, "Patchen Willicks—Bonnie Boy!"

Marie suspected some underhand devilment. She was kind and understanding in her approach.

"You boys are having fun, but I hope you're not saying any

bad words under your breath. That wouldn't be nice, you know. Mother is ill, so I have to keep watch over you. You wouldn't be saying bad words while Mother is sick abed, would you?"

Van confessed everything. We had gone to The Corner, and those names were on posters up there. We had just thought that if people could print the names for everybody to see, it ought to be all right to say them.

Marie gently explained that those were not nice words, and that good boys who expected to be confirmed some day should avoid them. They were the names of horses that nice people didn't talk about.

"Well," I inquired, "is it all right to say Old Roan, and Old Tom, and Charlie and Doll and Moll?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well then, if it's all right to say their names, what's the matter with the names of other people's horses that they put pictures of right along the road at The Corner, where even women can see them?"

Explanation faltered. But we were assured that we should not use the words at all.

We learned a whole dictionary of bad words in one day. On a warm Sunday afternoon, Pat Nolan, red-mustached city fireman, drove out with his family in his shining new surrey. Bill Nolan, a little older than I, went down to the woods with Van and me. Bill was altogether citified. His clothes were much dressier than ours. His hands were unspoiled by work, and his face was untanned, but plentifully supplied with freckles.

Bill didn't seem to appreciate the kind of entertainment we could provide. We showed him where the wild grapes grew in plenty, but he didn't like wild grapes. Same as to wild plums, gooseberries, raspberries, and such fruits of the wild. He preferred to get them as they came from the store, he said. And, as for finding possums, what would one do with them anyway? Bill feared the brush might tear his clothes, and he refused to climb trees just for fun.

But when we sat down under a tree, near the edge of the pasture, Bill told us all about dirty words. Oh, there were many, many of

them, and it was great fun to use them in conversation with other boys. Town boys all used them, said Bill, and wouldn't even understand your language if you failed to toss one in every here and there.

Mastering the pronunciation was not difficult, but you had only begun when you could pronounce those words. You had to have some appreciation of their meaning. Bill had not progressed far in this part of the lesson when he was bitten by several red ants upon whose home he had been sitting. While Van and I laughed immoderately, Bill howled with fear that the ants would give him blood poison.

When we came back to the house there was cold lemonade ready for us, and afterwards we three adjourned to the maple grove, east of the house, to practice the bad words. Seeing the black surrey and bay team tied to the hitching post near the grove, Bill suggested that many town boys made a practice of writing bad words in the thin layer of dust that accumulates on shiny surfaces. I tried it on the dashboard, splashers, and rear of the Nolan carriage, and it worked perfectly. The obscene words stood out strongly. Bill said he thought that was as good a job as any town boy could do, and I felt that I was making progress in the sophisticated way of life.

When it came time for the Nolans to leave, the two families gathered about the Nolan carriage while goodbyes were said and invitations issued for further getting together. Fortunately, Mr. Nolan reached the equipage before the others, and, with the palm of his right hand obliterated most of the words that were in plain sight. I doubt that anybody else saw the vandalism.

The Nolans never visited us again. Much later, I learned that Mr. Nolan advised his wife against permitting their son to associate with the Driscoll boys, who, he said, were a little too far advanced in lechery for the good of any well-raised Catholic boy.

Van and I discussed at length what might have been the effect of the writing on the Nolan surrey. I was optimistic. Mr. Nolan would certainly think that the bad words had been scribbled there by some town boy. I said that one living in the city must come upon such inscriptions daily.

Van hinted that if Mother ever should find out—through Mrs. Nolan, for instance—there would surely be a terrific scene. That sobered me, and I said several prayers to St. Anthony, asking him to keep Mother and Mrs. Nolan apart for at least a considerable period of time. If they could be kept permanently out of each other's sight, I would appreciate it. I took to carrying about in my pants pockets a small statue of St. Anthony, encased in a little leaden shell, which Aunt Fannie had sent me.

Van observed that I lived in terror of Mother's finding out about the desecration of Nolan's carriage. He began blackmailing me. He got me to pump water when it was his turn, and even used the threat of exposure in making trades. We traded clippings which we used in our scrapbooks. For a long time, Van had the advantage in all trades, merely because I was afraid he would expose my crime if I didn't give him the long end of the deal.

When I had been reduced to virtual slavery, Van began punishing me for any supposed misconduct by chanting, in a low tone, in the presence of Mother and the girls, "Wrote swears on Nolan's bug-gy!"

This chant began very low, the voice rising in the scale to the final fatal word. We always called any kind of stylish vehicle a buggy.

When Van began chanting, I left the room. Thus he could chase me out when he didn't want me, when he wanted my chair or the magazine I was reading, or for any other sinister purpose.

At length, driven to desperation like many another victim of blackmail, I defied my tormentor, and he told Mother about the crime. I was questioned by Mother, but was not punished. She knew that I had suffered enough for my offense. Thereafter I was free, and from that day until now I have never paid tribute of any kind to any blackmailer.

We had more complete lessons in the facts of life from John Whaley, son of the slicker, Pat. John frequently came out to stay with us for a day, a week, or a month. Unlike Bill Nolan, he was unafraid of woods, wild animals, or hornets. He was a grand

playmate, and could climb a tree as well and quickly and dangerously as I could.

One day John told us about the bad women of South Fourth avenue. South Fourth ran along the west side of the Santa Fe railroad tracks, from Douglas avenue southward. Every Sunday morning our John drove the spring wagon, loaded with the family, the length of South Fourth, on the way to church. It was explained that we did not want to drive on good streets, where we might meet our town friends, because the spring wagon, horses and harness looked decidedly country-jake.

We boys had noticed that transoms, windows and doors along this street bore the names of those who dwelt within. In many cases a gaslight in a red glass casing carried the name. We supposed that this was a city custom, possibly for the convenience of the mailman.

The names inscribed were Miss Lucy, Miss Ella, Miss Flo, Miss Nellie, and so on through a long catalog of feminine names. Idly, I speculated one Sunday morning, whether the man of the house ever put out his name for the mailman, or whether the fortunate daughters got all the letters. At this, Mother suggested that we were going to be late for ten-thirty Mass, and I had better be saying my rosary to make up for the time we would lose at the beginning.

On another Sunday I had made the brilliant suggestion that we ought to have signs like that, and a red light, at our house, since travelers who wished to find our place at night invariably got lost. This suggestion met with cold silence, except the noise made by John, sucking air through his teeth on the right-hand side of his mouth.

John Whaley explained to us that these houses were all occupied by bad women. Very bad. So bad, in fact, that one did not talk about them before the ladies of one's family.

Papa, explained John, had to collect rent from these bad women, and that was how John had heard all about them. In fact, Papa had once taken John along on a rent-collecting tour, and had left him in the parlor while he went back with Miss Emma, one of the worst, to compel her to pay her rent. The two had returned in a

happy mood, so John guessed Papa had succeeded in forcing her to pay up.

Town boys with whom I afterward talked agreed that it was true that Papa Whaley did make certain collections regularly along South Fourth avenue.

I asked why the police didn't find out about these bad women and dispose of them summarily. John said he suspected some such move might be brewing, since Papa was constantly in touch with the Chief, and probably had told him all about the situation. We might expect a few hangings at any time. Hanging certainly was the lightest punishment the law could be expected to impose upon such bad women, whose offenses were beyond discussion among nice people.

John explained that these women had a habit of sitting about in their parlors and even on their porches, not fully or adequately clad, and that one of their customary gestures was that of pulling up the skirt so as to show their legs. This seemed to me to be a perversion beyond human understanding, and I took for granted that such gross indecency constituted the crime of the bad women, for which they would surely hang if the Chief and Papa ever got the goods on them with witnesses.

That day we played a game, or drama, the continuity for which I prepared. I rehearsed John in the part of his eminent father, Van in the part of the Chief, and I was the common hangman. The piece was called "The Hanging of Miss Emma."

A tall baking powder can took the part of Miss Emma, because John had told us that these women invariably wore too much powder on their faces and often wore red dresses. The can bore the familiar red label of the Royal brand.

In the final scene, Miss Emma, having failed to pay her rent and promise to keep her skirts down, was led to a gallows which I had built back of the brickpile. There she was given a last chance to repent and pay Mr. Whaley. Instead, the brazen hussy deliberately lifted her skirt clear up to the knee.

However, she did repent sufficiently to blush when the crowd turned its faces away from the disturbing sight. The hangman



cried, "Oh, she's so shamed!" and sprung the trap. Miss Emma dangled in midair, at the end of a length of binder twine, a lesson in public morals for all the world.

Van and I no longer talked about the signs on South Fourth avenue, as we drove by in dignified righteousness on our way to Mass. We knew that dark deeds were done along this street. Self-consciously, we watched, without pretending to watch, to see whether any of the bad women on the porches were lifting their skirts.

*A boy likes to be proud of his dad.*

*I was proud of Big Flurry, and fought many a battle with boys at school who made fun of his Irish brogue and called him "Crazy Arishman."*

*I was proud of his gigantic stature, of his prodigious strength and endurance, of his wit and his fearlessness.*

*But I had no desire to be like him. I sensed his dissatisfaction with life, his awareness that he was alone. Children fear isolation. They want to merge with the herd.*

*I knew that the boys who made fun of Dad's brogue spoke very bad English, with a colloquial twang that would make them objects of derision in those distant cities where great newspapers were published. I was reading every line of every New York World and St. Louis Republic that came to our house.*

*I clutched at an ambition to learn to speak and write good English, so that I might properly rebuke the detractors of Big Flurry and shame them into silence.*

*I studied the big dictionary at school, copied interesting words, with their pronunciations, and went about the corrals, using them on the cows and hogs. I discovered that the use of big words and thundering sentences often silenced my tormentors at school. Because I talked big, they were afraid of me.*

*Big Flurry wanted his boys to be farmers. One after the other, they disappointed him.*

*I was his youngest boy, and he held great hopes for me. But secretly I was determined to escape from the farm that seemed such a cruel master to both my parents.*

*When the Old Man discovered this, his frustration seemed complete.*

EVERY family in the Valley had a representative in the Anti-Horse-Thief Association, known everywhere by its initials. The A.H.T.A. held regular monthly meetings at the nearest schoolhouse. We always knew, next day, when the Association had had a meeting at our school. Tobacco had been spat all over the floor, and there were several empty bottles on the grounds.

Big Flurry paid his membership dues, but never attended a meeting. He had no stomach for an evening of sociable chewing and drinking, and he did not like dirty stories.

This may be the place to record that I never heard Dad tell a dirty story, nor utter a sentence that was dirty in the sense of sex dirtiness. He did not permit such talk on his premises. Hired men were notably inclined to talk of sex, of conquests, of common bawdy-house filth. As soon as one of them started a sentence in this vein, he was interrupted by the Boss, "Tut! That's enough from you! None of that kind of talk here."

It became noised about among the casual workers that Old Man Driscoll would permit all the swearing in the world, but not a line of that dirty stuff. In practice, the Boss encouraged respectful silence among the hirelings. But if they talked, their talk must be fit for ladies to hear.

Mother was even more circumspect in this regard. One of the earliest battles between Big Flurry and Mother that I can remember resulted from what seemed to me a cryptic sentence spoken by the Boss at the table.

The Old Man had been to town with a load of potatoes. Returning at half-past ten without breakfast, he put up his team and came in to enjoy the late morning meal his wife quickly prepared for him. After the second cup of coffee had been served and saucered

and sipped with loud intake noises, there was time for reporting the events of the morning, what had happened at the market, how much he had got for his produce, and whom he had seen and talked with.

"And I went around to John McGowan's . . ."

McGowan operated a tea and coffee store. He was a short, stocky, dark bachelor, with black handlebar mustache and a devilish eye for the women. He may have been forty when Big Flurry first made his acquaintance. The two were friends for life.

"Mac's store is in the Manhattan Hotel building, you know, and part of the hotel is up over the store. There's a convention of priests, or some big shindig of the church, I don't know what, going on. Mac says a lot of the priests are at the hotel, and he says that last night they were cutting up, up there."

The Boss got no further with his recital, if there was more to tell.

Mother's face went scarlet.

"Don't tell me any more from that dirty-minded Orangeman!" she said. "I don't want to hear his filthy lies about the priests. You never saw a dirty old woman-chaser like that fellow, with a devil's light in his eyes, that you wouldn't hear slander of the priests from him. I will never go into his store again, and I don't want any of his dirty coffee in this house."

Big Flurry looked up from his coffee, seemingly puzzled, and certainly swept off his feet.

"Sure, glory be to God, Ellen, all he said was that they were cutting up, up there. Don't you suppose that priests ever cut up? Sure, McGowan wouldn't be saying dirt about the priests to me. He is a bachelor, ourself, and is that any crime, I don't know?"

But Mother was angry, and not easy to appease. When the big man went out to his work, he was mumbling, calling upon God to witness that he had started something without knowing it, and wishing, more audibly, that he was in hell.

The only time we ever had any occasion to call for the services of the A.H.T.A., the event was too pressing for sending out a call.

Rising early one damp morning, after a rainy night, Big Flurry found wagon tracks leading to the granary. Those tracks had not been there the previous evening, and they led off across a field, instead of up or down the regular driveway. Looking into the granary, the Boss found that his great canvas sail, known on the farm as the tarpaulin, was missing.

This mighty piece of canvas was a ship's mainsail. Big Flurry had bought it for a song from a ship's captain who was refitting in the port of Erie. It was a heavy canvas, with stout brass eyes around the margins, here and there. Neatly folded into a pack, as it always was when not in use or out to dry in the sun, it was a load that no one man I ever saw try it, except only Big Flurry himself, could lift to his shoulder alone.

No work about the farm delighted the big Irishman more than handling the mainsail. The newest stack of wheat, oats, rye or millet was covered with that great canvas. The process of getting the canvas into place was complicated and laborious, and required the labor of from two to four men, depending upon the height of the stack.

Dad was an expert stack-builder. His wheat stacks were models for the countryside. He placed every bundle with his own hands, John or a hired man pitching the bundles from the rack to the stack. A wheat stack was round at the base, came to a sharp point at the apex, and was shaped somewhat like a top, bulging a little below the middle. Butts of bundles were kept toward the weather, heads inside. Dad never lost a bushel of wheat in the stack. The only force he feared for his stacked grain was lightning, and he took out insurance for protection against that form of destruction.

A stack was thirty feet high when completed, with capsheaves of poorer quality wheat on top, one or two stakes driven at easy angles to hold the cap against the wind, and a final capping of weeds or cane-stalks. But the stack had to settle before it was properly rain-proof. During the settling period, the great mainsail was prime protection.

But Big Flurry would hoist the mainsail over a stack of ordinary prairie hay if he could do it in a terrific storm, at night. Kansas

knows how to provide storms to delight the hearts of old sailors.

The wind would be at half-gale strength, the lightning crashing all around, ripping down the old cottonwood trees, and rain or hail would be coming in with the wind, terrifically.

Then was the hour for action!

Big Flurry was at the bottom of the stairs, shouting above the crash of thunder:

"Ahoy Jan! Flurrence, Charlie-bye! All hands on deck to make fast the gear! All hands, all hands! Shake a leg there, ye in the fo'castle!"

We stumbled out into the storm, half asleep. Mother had been afoot before we had got our coats on, and had sprinkled holy water over us, saying to each, "May the cross of Christ be between you and all harm." She added, "I'll have hot coffee for you when you come in."

The wild wind and stinging rain or hail soon woke us to alert activity. Within a quarter of an hour we were sharing the Old Man's delight in defiance of the storm. We couldn't get any wetter, and being wet was not unpleasant, once you got used to it. Hats were not worn, since they would not stay on.

There stood Big Flurry on the apex of the stack, the wind blowing his whiskers and long hair far out. Lightning crashed all about, seeming to tease the active figure by playing around him. The thunder was like explosions of TNT, and the water was running off our heads in torrents.

Big Flurry had taken aloft with him coils of one-inch hemp rope, an axe, some stakes which he always kept sharpened and waiting. He shouted his orders against the roar of the storm.

"Stand by to loose the mainsail! Take this line! Make fast now! Fast it is! Haul away! So! Stations below! Haul away, lads! Belay that line to the apple tree on the starboard!"

The stack of prairie hay wasn't worth the labor, but it was great fun. When the job was done, that stack was firmly anchored, and the new hay was saved from a thorough wetting that would have spoiled it. However, one stack, more or less, of prairie hay, was of no great consequence.

As we turned our backs upon the job and started for the house, the Old Man would issue the Captain's reward, as customary after action at sea: "Well done."

When we entered the kitchen, we found dry clothes for each one, on chairs, and a hot fire in the kitchen stove. Mother had the coffee on. She greeted us as returning heroes, with the simple words, "Thanks be to God." I felt like a man.

Dad followed the fresh wagon-tracks across the field to the dead-end road, which was the boundary between our farm and that to the north, at this time owned and occupied by bewhiskered John Stough and his large family. Tracks indicated that the thieves had taken the road toward the east. Obviously, they did not know the country, or they would have known that this road would lead them into underbrush, and, finally, to the river, which could not be crossed.

Big Flurry returned, saddled a horse, and set out after the robbers. As he reached the road, he met Rob Stough, one of the older sons of the neighboring family. He told his story. Rob also saddled a horse. Rob was a tall, strong, gangling lad, slow of speech but quick of action in emergency. He was known as an expert catcher of runaway horses, and wasn't afraid of the devil.

Neither of the thief-hunters was armed. Dad did not permit fire-arms to be kept on the farm. He was afraid one of the youngsters might kill himself or somebody else with a gun, so there were no guns.

It was clear that the robbery had occurred late in the night, not long before dawn. The tracks were fresh. The robbers would find themselves stopped by the river. Then they would have to turn around and come back. It was only half a mile to the river, the last quarter mile being unused road, choked with brush, which could be navigated by a team and wagon with difficulty.

The two found the thieves' wagon and team of scrawny horses, stalled in the brush, facing west. It was evident that they had turned around to return over the road they had taken eastward. But there was no person with the wagon, and the tarpaulin was not there.

Two loaded shotguns were in the wagon-box. There was some ammunition, and half a wagonload of odds and ends.

Tracks in the fresh mud indicated that two men had left the wagon, walking close together, headed toward the river. The easy conclusion was that the thieves were off with their heavy burden, to hide it in the brush before venturing to retrace their road past the house of the farmer who had been robbed.

Big Flurry and Rob tied their horses to a tree, took the thieves' shotguns, and made long strides eastward. Within a few yards they spied the robbers, making heavy weather of it with the bulky roll of canvas balanced between them. They were near the bank of the river, headed for a thicket.

When within easy range, Big Flurry shouted mightily, "Come out of there with that, ye thieving omathans!"

The robbers, frightened half out of their trifling wits, thought of a silly expedient to keep themselves out of prison. Being only a few feet from the river bank, they quickly reached the edge of the water and dumped the canvas into the stream.

This angered Big Flurry more than the loss of the canvas had angered him. He had never believed in guns, and probably didn't know how to shoot one. He tossed the shotgun into the brush and rushed at the pair of thieves like a tornado. Rob stood by, shotgun cocked and ready.

One swing with the right open hand, another with the left, and Big Flurry had the two malefactors floundering in the river. He stood on the bank, leaning over, shouting maledictions and orders.

"Hoist that mainsail out of there now, ye bloody pissabeds! Is it Jesse James ye think ye are, God damn your lazy souls to hell, and that ye may die without the priest if ye don't save that tarpaulin!

"I work me bloody fingers to the bone to buy that mainsail for me auld age, and a couple of lousy basthards come in the night and thry to steal it! I'll kick the arse of ye back to Arkansaw where ye damn well came from if ye don't dhrownd there now like a couple of half-pay English officers, too lazy to swim! Get a move on, God damn ye, or I'll have Rob peppering ye with bird shot!"

Big Flurry was playing Captain Sheppard now, dancing mad,



The frightened thieves were indeed a scraggly pair of poor-whites from the Ozark foothills, ill-fed and cowardly. They struggled in the water, whining that they were drowning, although the water was not over their shoulders. The canvas bundle had caught on an overhanging willow branch, and was rapidly becoming water-logged and much heavier than it had been.

Under the lash of Big Flurry's tongue, reinforced by an occasional log or stump or post hurled at them from the shore, the poor devils fought with the heavy canvas, unrolled it, got one corner ashore, and gradually brought in the rest. The Irishman made them roll it, shipshape and Bristol fashion, administering an occasional kick on the behind when the work was unskillfully done.

All this took an hour. Then the thieves were marched to their wagon, bearing their heavy burden. They puffed and sweated, the taller one complaining that most of the weight was on him, and that he had been opposed to the robbery from the beginning.

The smaller thief spied the shotgun that Big Flurry had tossed away. It had landed across the wagon track. The little fellow slipped from under his load and grasped the gun. As he attempted to shift it into firing position, before whirling around upon his captors, Big Flurry caught up with him. One kick on the up-ended rear of the outlaw, and that young man went head over heels, landing on the hard roadway with a jolt that must have made him dizzy.

Scorning to pick up the disputed weapon, the big Irishman stepped over, took the fellow by the scruff of the neck, and led him back to his task.

The two strangers loaded the canvas into their wagon, and were ordered to drive to the place whence they had stolen the property. Rob and Dad rode along behind, the one with a shotgun, the other unarmed.

The family stood on the front porch, anticipating murder, and worse. The two jailbirds were tough looking customers as they drove their raw-boned team up the hill.

John alone seemed entirely calm. He rubbed his chin and said, as the cavalcade passed toward the barnyard, "Evidently they thought they were something, whereas they were nothing. Such

people always devise traps that defeat the purpose for which they were intended."

Dad made the thieves spread the tarpaulin out in a sunny space. He asked a few questions, while they pleaded that he not turn them over to the law. One of them had applied for a job at the farm a few days earlier, and had seen the pile of canvas. They were on their way to the Indian Territory by easy stages, so they decided to steal the sail to make a shelter for themselves when they reached their destination. The dead-end road had been their undoing.

The Old Man fed their horses while the work was going forward. The animals seemed half-starved.

"'Twould be fittier by far for ye to be stealing some oats for these crow-baits than to be robbing an honest man of his only main-sail," he moralized.

As if it were a grudging afterthought, Big Flurry added, "Have ye had your breakfast, I don't know?"

"Kape your eye on the spalpheens, Rob," said Big Flurry, when the thieves had admitted that they hadn't had anything to eat for a long time. "Don't that they take the gun out of your hands while you stand dhreaming about the gaarls."

He went to the house. "Ellen," he said, "have you got a bite to eat for these hungry flops-ile-guys, I don't know?"

He went back to the barnyard with a steaming pot of coffee, a loaf of bread, a half pound of butter, and a hunk of ham, with a pot of boiled salt pork on the side.

"Sit down there and eat now," he commanded, "and let me not hear of ye thrying any more of your Arkansaw thricks on the farmers around here. 'Tis by hard work we makes our living, and not by sthreeeling around the counthry, robbing honest men."

Dad and Rob busied themselves with the horses and a few minor chores while the captives regaled themselves, eating and drinking ravenously. Dad filled a gunnysack with corn and tossed it into the wagon. Likewise, a few spare ribs from the brine barrel.

Rob said, "I'll ride to town and get the sheriff if you want me to, Mr. Driscoll."

"Sheriff be damned!" answered the Old Man, "What's the use

locking up a couple of half-starved billy-goats that thrives to steal a home for themselves? A clout on the head and a kick in the arse will do them more good than all the lice in the Wishita jail."

The clouts and kicks were duly administered as the two robbers were ordered into their wagon.

"Get along with ye now, and good luck to yel!" he called, as he poked one of the bony horses into action.

*There was a tremendous amount of praying done at our house.*

*There always was a great deal to ask God for. Nearly all summer we prayed for rain. Seasonally, Protestants and Catholics joined their petitions for this much-sought blessing. But it sometimes happened in the spring that we would have to ask God to send enough dry weather to mature the wheat without rust. And when the river got out of its banks we prayed nightly for abatement of the flood.*

*Fear of windstorms drove me to a frantic form of prayer when I was still too young to know much about praying. When dark clouds formed, I walked around and around the house, repeating in a mumbling voice, "I hope and I hope and I hope it won't rain!" I continued this ceremony, sometimes grasping my lucky spool in one hand, until the storm passed or broke.*

*Later, I devised a formula for repeating night and morning, and on the way to school: "God save us from tornadoes and lightning, make a good boy out of me, make Mother well and keep Dad from raising hell with her."*

*As I grew older and began to dread that my sins might bring down upon me the punishment of a lifetime on the farm, I used this form of prayer many times a day: "God grant me good health and a good education."*

*I figured that with health and education I could get away from the farm all right, so I never asked God specifically to transport me to some other place.*

TIME came when the giant was laid low, and the trot of the doctor's horse was heard for Big Flurry himself. It was in winter that he was stricken with typhoid and pneumonia, so the farm work didn't suffer much. John and two hired men carried on with the feeding of cattle and hogs. There was plenty of feed. John even took fat hogs to the stockyards when the hired man said they looked fat enough to sell, and so the drug and doctor bills were kept within reasonable bounds.

Never had he been ill before, except for colds, and once, early in his married life, when he had had a mysterious illness that the doctor called a stroke. That time, he had been sitting at dinner in the Driscoll home in Erie, with several friends as guests. All of a sudden the big fellow had dropped his fork on the floor. As the company turned to rebuke him playfully for his awkwardness, he had slipped silently to the floor, unconscious.

Dr. Brandes had said that he might get well, but would have to stay in bed, most quietly. Big Flurry was back at his coal shoveling within ten days.

He had never had any recurrence of that ailment. He had reached middle life with unimpaired strength, although he had scorned to take precautions against the weather, contagion, overwork or poison ivy.

Here he was now, burning with fever in the bed I had been occupying, on the south side of the big bedroom, upstairs. Doctors Fordyce and Van Nuys, partners in a flourishing practice, called together and separately. They gave little encouragement.

When a strong man, with perfect vital organs, fights combined typhoid and pneumonia, you have a beautiful battle, from the standpoint of the doctors. There's a sporting element involved that

delights the medical men. Doctors Fordyce and Van Nuys could hardly stay away from our farm. This was something to write up in the note-books.

Day after day, the big man became weaker. For days and nights on end he was delirious. He came out of a period of delirium weak, scarcely able to speak. The great, powerful body was wasted away by weeks of fever, until the bones showed their stark protuberances through the transparent skin.

One day, after much prayer, Mother found Himself conscious, his mind clear, but his pulse so low that she was frightened. She said, "Flurry, you are sensible now. You have been awful sick. The doctors say you are still so sick that they do not know whether you will get well. You've been close to the edge, these last few nights. May I get Father Tihen to come and give you the sacraments? You understand. You may get well, but the chances aren't very good. If you have to go, you'll want to be prepared. If prayer can save you, you will get well. I've been praying night and day. But it may be God's will that you go now. If that is so, all we must think about is your eternal home, where we'll all be together some day, and you'll be with Stevie and Katie. John will go and get Father Tihen if you'll just say so."

"Tell Jan to take care of the fattening hogs, if he can," replied the sick man, in a shaky, gasping voice. "As for Father Tihen, I haven't done anything for him these many years. How should I ask him to do anything for me now?"

This was the Old Man's way of referring to his defection from the church. He had not been to church or received the sacraments for several years; therefore, why should he expect anything of the church in the way of final consolation?

Big Flurry's alienation from the church began with an incident that was often disputed. He said, "Father Kelly posted me name on the door of the church for arrears in pew rent. And God knows that knows me heart I have always paid me pew rent in advance. It was a disgrace, and I won't go to his church any more, where me face is disgraced before the people."

Mother explained the incident thus. Father Gregory Kelly never

posted anybody's name on the door for non-payment of pew rent. What actually happened was that a list of pew-holders was tacked on the inside of the church doors for the guidance of ushers in seating the congregation. Ushers were supposed to study this list, familiarize themselves with pew-holders, and seat them politely upon arrival.

Pew 32 was labeled F. Driscoll. Pew rent, not a heavy tax, was paid regularly, in advance. But one month, by typographical error, the name of Driscoll was omitted from the list of pew-holders. Some trouble-maker told Big Flurry that anybody reading the list on the church door would conclude that Driscoll had not paid his pew rent.

So the Old Man got the notion that his name had been publicly posted as a non-payer. He was shocked, offended, mortally hurt. He would go to hell rather than return to Father Kelly's church.

Time passed, and Father Kelly was transferred to another parish. Big Flurry started going to church again. But now he did not drive the spring wagon or ride with his family. He went on horseback, by himself. His reason was that the women were delaying departure of the family party by spending too much time lacing up their corsets and putting baking powder on their faces. In frock coat, black hat, and white shirt, he would be off in his western saddle, on Old Prince, ten or fifteen minutes before the spring wagon lumbered down the hill with the rest of the family aboard.

Big Flurry was right, too. The family was nearly always late for Mass. Sunday after Sunday, we would walk up the aisle, heads down, ashamed of the notorious fact that we were once again coming in during the sermon. Lateness, tardiness, was a family characteristic which Big Flurry did not share. The children were generally late for school, but Big Flurry never heard anything about that, nor was he interested. But if he was going to church, he was going to be there on time.

Father John Henry Tihen came in as pastor. He was an earnest young man of German-American parentage, hard-working, zealous, dignified, but a human being withal. He did what he was required to do, and after that he was a good fellow, a friend of everybody.

He thought prohibition a heresy, and was not above drinking beer at the bar with the rest of the customers, in any good Wichita saloon, although they were all under the ban of the civil law.

Big Flurry liked and respected young Father Tihen, but he had no respect for the bishop.

The bishop was John Joseph Hennessy, an Irishman from Cape Girardeau, Missouri. He was pompous and fat. He was more ceremonious than any pope.

It was related that when Hennessy was appointed to the new frontier see of Wichita, he did not realize how primitive his new charge was to be. It was a missionary diocese, supported in part by donations from the faithful in eastern United States.

When the congregation at Wichita heard that the town was at long last going to be the see of a real, live bishop, it was proud indeed. A bishop had been appointed for the see several years earlier, but had died on his way to his charge. He had looked upon the poverty and distress of the poor farmers, while they were fighting a greater grasshopper plague than ever Moses sent upon Egypt, and dropped dead.

Not so Hennessy. He came, looked over the scene, and decided to maintain himself in a state becoming a bishop.

The women of the Pro-Cathedral congregation had worked like slaves, fixing up a three-room cottage that had been bought for the new bishop, next door to the church. They housecleaned it, put freshly washed rag carpets on the floors, and gave furniture, which they also installed, to make the new ordinary happy. When the day of his arrival came, a committee of the hard-working ladies was on hand to welcome the new pastor of souls.

The committee met the new bishop at the Santa Fe station, dutifully knelt and kissed his ring, and saw him and his baggage into a hack. Then they got into their wagons, buggies and carts, and drove along behind the bishop to his new home.

The bishop thoughtfully kept the hack waiting. He went to the front door of his home, looked disapprovingly over the layout, and announced to the hack driver, "This place is not fit for human habitation. Drive me to the best hotel in town."



So the bishop took up residence at Hotel Carey, a grand place, five and a half stories high, the tallest and biggest building in town. It was built and owned by John Carey, mayor of Wichita during the boom years, when wild boosters claimed that the city achieved a population of forty thousand. Already, when Bishop Hennessy began to look around upon his realm, the population had sunk to half that figure, and half the buildings in town were vacant. Farmers were burning corn in their stoves because they could not sell it at any price, and relatives in the East were supplying much of the bread that the producers of vast quantities of wheat were eating.

Around and around the muddy, rutty, unkempt streets of the poverty-stricken frontier town went His Lordship, the Right Reverend John Joseph, by the grace of God and the favor of the Holy Apostolic See, Bishop of Wichita and Administrator of Concordia. It seems that the bishop of Concordia had died of the scene, too.

The new bishop seldom appeared on the streets, and never afoot. The shiniest hack in town was engaged for his transportation. Four white horses drew the hack, upon certain ceremonial occasions. The horses were furnished by Old Man Butler, who kept the livery stable, half a block from the Hotel Carey. The old fellow had quite a time training them to work in a four-horse team on a hack. But the bishop said that a bishop was entitled to four white horses, even in Wichita. In France, where things were done much better for the glory of God, six white horses were allotted to many bishops. As pastor of borderline souls, His Lordship would manage to get along with four horses, so long as they were white.

Bishop Hennessy was a stickler for ceremony. When he pontificated at Mass, it took a train of acolytes half a block long to bring him his vestments, and the same train to take away the same vestments at the close of Mass. He insisted upon the last mite of glory that the ritual allowed to a bishop. His sermons were spoken in a low tone, scarcely audible in the center of the church, where our pew was.

Big Flurry didn't like Hennessy or any of his airs or pretensions. Most of all, he loathed the ceremony of vesting and divesting the

bishop at Mass. He had never seen any bishop command such an army of altar boys before, and he concluded that something was wrong.

One Saturday afternoon, long before the typhoid-pneumonia struck, I heard Mother talking to Dad.

"I have made and ironed a nice new white shirt for you, Flurry. It hasn't any hard bosom, but it will look nice on you. I have cleaned all your clothes and brushed your good hat. Will you go to church tomorrow?"

The Old Man sat by the kitchen stove, looking hard at the floor.

"Sure no," he said, quietly.

"But Flurry, why don't you go to Mass any more? I'm awfully worried. You might get sick, God knows, and we never can tell when we may be called. Won't you start tomorrow, and go back to church with us?"

"I will nat!"

"But why? Have you any reason? Father Tihen is such a fine priest, and a holy man, and he was always nice to you. He likes the children, and we have two coming along to be confirmed, not so long from now. Tell me, what keeps you away from the church?"

The Old Man continued to look at the floor for some time. There was silence. Then he jumped to his feet, reached for his hat and started for the door. As his hand was on the knob he turned, and in a bellowing voice proclaimed:

"I'll go there no more! Too God-damned much dhressing and undhressing!"

So it was that in the hour when that fell sergeant, Death, was reaching to make his arrest, Big Flurry said to his wife, "I haven't done anything for Father Tihen these many years; how should I ask him to do anything for me now?"

It was a close call, but the big fellow recovered. It was pitiful to see him, in the days of his convalescence, being almost carried down the steep stairs by John, with Marie or Mother helping. Then he sat there, his sunken eyes staring, while he regained his breath.

But presently he was asking about the hogs, the cattle, and how

their weight looked as of today. Good God, couldn't anybody tell him how much a steer weighed without putting him on the scale at the stockyards, ourself? He was a little proud, perhaps, of the fact that he was never known to guess the weight of a steer more than ten pounds off.

He was well in time for spring planting. Oats seeding came first. There was still a little nip in the air, though the sun was shining, when it came time to broadcast a field of oats. The field had been plowed and harrowed until there was a fine seedbed of mellow earth, waiting to receive its seed for the first crop of the year.

The horses were hitched to the harrow, but they were tied up at the headland. Big Flurry carried the oats in a grain sack that he had fashioned into a kind of sling, around his neck. The mouth of the sack opened in such manner that it could be reached easily by the right hand.

Up to the headland went the sower. Solemnly he removed his hat and set it on the ground. He looked down the long field, made the Sign of the Cross, and murmured, "Well, with God's help, we hope for a crop."

Then he went down the field with swinging stride, every muscle working in rhythm, the right arm swinging in unison with the legs, the trunk swaying, eyes fixed straight ahead.

The right arm swung in a regularly repeated arc, and the seed went from the loosened fingers like a measured shower. Each square foot of that field received its share of seed, and no small spot had more than another spot of equal size. Never yet has man devised a machine so perfect in its sowing as was the broadcaster who knew and loved his work.

When the seeding had been completed, the harrow was driven over the field once. If rain came within the week, as it usually did at that time of year, the oat crop was on its way. Harvest for oats was often on or about July 4. Many a time it was necessary to cancel the national holiday in order to harvest the oats.

Meantime came potato planting. We boys hated the potato crop more than any other thing on the farm. Boy labor was used heavily in production of this, one of our most important crops. Big Flurry

knew how to grow potatoes, and he had as good potato soil as could be found in the world.

Our first intimation of potato season was the arrival in the east yard, about March 1, of a wagonload of seed potatoes in burlap bags. This load was carried into the cellar, and next day another load appeared. Dad never consulted with the family or anybody in it as to what he was going to plant this season, or how much. Each move was a surprise to the family.

It was necessary to bring in fresh seed potatoes from the north every spring. Due to climatic conditions, our own potatoes would produce only second-grade tubers if used for seed in our soil.

The weather was still quite cold in early March. There might be snow, and there was sure to be cold, icy wind. The cellar was not a cozy retreat in such weather. Dad sat there all day long, day after day, bundled in his great gray ulster, with gunnysacks wrapped around his feet and a felt cap pulled down over his ears, cutting potato seed. In the evening, after supper, the whole family joined him. On Saturdays, or on other days when we were not in school, we boys sat in that silent circle, both day and night sessions, cutting, cutting, cutting.

Anybody can cut potato seed after a brief lesson. Every eye in a potato is a possible seed or source of a sprout. So, the first rule in seed-cutting is to be sure that you have a whole, unblemished eye in each chunk you cut. Next rule is, do not cut too close to the eye. Don't be stingy, attempting to make too many seed-pieces out of each potato. Leave a good chunk of potato with each seed-eye you pick for propagation of a new plant. If your chunk contains two or three eyes, no harm done.

It doesn't take long or tire you out too much to cut up a bushel of potatoes. But when they are stacked to the ceiling, you make slow progress indeed. The back of the short paring knife you are using gradually cuts a groove in the under side of the right index finger, and that part of the hand, soaked in the sharp acid of the potato, becomes as sore as a boil. You wrap the knife handle in cloth, wrap your hand, wear an old glove, but you're bound to slow up on account of the hurt.

When seed-cutting begins, it is still winter. When it is finished, spring is crowding the farmer.

Big Flurry started his planting of potatoes on St. Patrick's Day, as a concession to tradition. But he did not push the planting until the ground was a little warmer, perhaps about the twenty-third of March, if the season happened to be normal.

Planting occupied many days. We boys had to stay out of school for potato planting, even when mere children. Boy-power was just as good for this job as man-power, and much cheaper. Sometimes Dad hired one man to help with the planting, but most of the potatoes were dropped by family labor. Dad almost never called upon the women of the family for such work, and never for what might properly be called field work. Many neighbors, particularly in the uplands, worked their women as regular farm hands, behind teams and on implements. Big Flurry expressed the belief that the women had their hands full with their own jobs, which, indeed, they had.

The method of planting potatoes was simple. The Boss plowed a furrow with a walking plow and two horses, the length of the field. A boy walked behind, in bare feet, gunnysack slung over his shoulder, in the fashion of the broadcaster of grain. One by one, the boy dropped the seed-pieces in the furrow. He measured with his foot and eye the proper distance apart for the seeds. About sixteen to eighteen inches should separate the potato stalks from one another, to give them room to develop the great hills of potatoes that they would surely produce.

The seed-pieces were scattered along the edges of the field in bushels or in bushel-and-a-peck bags. You filled a galvanized iron bucket with seed-pieces, and replenished the bag on your shoulder from this bucket.

The row dropped, Dad ran the plow the length of the field again, covering the seed-row with about five inches of rich earth.

It wasn't always quite as simple as this. Several open furrows were usually available at one time, so that there might be no delay in the seed-dropping. When there had been time for preparation of a perfect seed-bed, the whole field had been previously and recently

plowed and harrowed. Then a single-shovel plow, the shovel throwing earth both ways and making a v-shaped trench, was used for the seed-line. This made for a straighter and more orderly planting, since the seed dropped always into the straight v-line, instead of bouncing a few inches to right or left, as it did in the flat-bottomed furrow.

Before the potatoes had a chance to peep overground, the field was well harrowed to kill out the first crop of weeds, which by that time had begun to sprout under encouragement of the warm spring sun.

From then on, it was a battle with weeds. As soon as the potato plants were well above ground, the entire field had to be hoed, to kill out weeds within the row and to loosen up the soil so that the potatoes might breathe. The cultivator, drawn by two horses, the double-shovel, drawn by one horse, and the hoe, were constantly at work. Hoeing was boy-labor, chiefly.

Also, there was the battle against the bugs. Potatoes no sooner stick their leaves above ground than they are attacked by potato bugs, soft-bodied red ones, with ugly black spots, and hard-shelled ones with striped wings that are good for long flights from field to field.

Dad's method of fighting potato bugs was a simple and effective one. Keep the boys busy, when they were not hoeing or pulling weeds, at the fight. Each boy carried a galvanized iron bucket, holding it by the edge of the brim, not by the handle. The bucket in the left hand, a couple of young sunflower plants in the right, you walk down the row, holding the bucket under and beside each potato stalk, as though you were passing the collection basket in church. You give each stalk a gentle whack with the sunflower as you pass along, agitating it enough to knock several bugs into the bucket.

At regular intervals you jar the bucket on the ground, to discourage the ambitious bugs that are crawling up the sides. After several rows have been completed and your bucket is about one-quarter full of squirming bugs, you build a little fire, out on the road or in a vacant field, and toss the bugs into it.

You lose a certain proportion of the winged bugs. Some manage

to fly out of your bucket and a good many fly out of the fire. After the first week of bug-picking, you always find many with scorched wings, back at their destructive work.

It takes a certain amount of driving to keep young boys steadily at such tasks. Big Flurry had the drive. He did not believe in play. He considered all play by boys a sinful waste of time. He worked as hard as he could, and he expected the boys to work to the limit of their strength. Idleness was a crime not to be tolerated, and all play was idleness.

If Van and I were engaged in some kind of play, such as shooting Indians, throwing clods at a target, or making villages of foot-houses in fresh earth, and one of us saw the Old Man coming, a silent signal was given, and we at once tried to assume postures that indicated that we had not been playing. Self-consciousness usually betrayed us. The Boss would open his mouth wide when he was yards away, and a bellow would formulate itself thus:

"Do something! DO something! In the Name of God, don't that ye do be standing around with your hands in your pockets, like a half-pay English officer!"

In the Ireland he had known, many pensioned English officers, living on half pay, were to be seen, idling away the evening of their lives. The Irish hated and despised them, because they realized that these men had spent the best part of their lives fighting or oppressing the Irish, and were spending the rest of their days in idle luxury, at the expense of the hard-pressed Irish taxpayers. The epithet "half-pay English officer" was about the worst Dad could think of for a lazy person.

There was one expression that was more contemptuous. That was "soldier" or "soldiering."

Sailors have always hated soldiers, and for good reasons. In the British navy, for instance, there has always been a tendency to mutiny under certain conditions. There have been countless notable mutinies in the British navy. Lack of pay, a cut in pay, or the cutting off of the rum ration have been common causes of mutiny. British sailors have always shown a certain individuality, and have not hesitated to buck their officers when they have had grievances,

The supreme authority, when mutinies became so bad that they cost some victories, put armed soldiers on every man-of-war. Sailors were not armed, but these guards, called marine soldiers, had carbines and bayonets. They were there to make the sailors behave, to drive them to their tasks. Naturally, these marines did not associate with the sailors they were hired to drive and guard. Naturally, they did not work, as did the sailors. They stood or marched about the ship, and put on many airs.

At sea, the worst name that can be flung at a seaman is soldier. Any sailor will fight at that insult. The captain who knows his business will never accuse his men of "soldiering," which means loafing on the job. There is one notable case on record of mutiny and piracy growing out of a captain's unwise use of the word soldier.

The captain was having trouble with his crew. In a scathing talk, he called them "a lot of soldiers." When the talk was finished, the men sent a delegation to the captain.

"We'll work hard and not complain about worms in the grub, Captain, and we won't mind the cat when we deserve it. But we can't take that word soldier from anybody, Sir!" The man who delivered the crew's message was ironed, and the captain made another speech, again accusing the men of soldiering. They killed him, took charge of the ship, and, in their knowledge of blood guilt, knew not what to do but go pirating.

So Dad never accused us of soldiering. But I have heard him fire the accusation at lazy hired men, when he was discharging them.

A favorite taunt of the Old Man's, directed at Van and me when we seemed to be doing nothing of importance, was: "Get to wurruck! Get to wurruck! Ye reads so much, I should think ye'd learn how to pull them weeds out of the potatoes! G'on now, and see can ye learn without reading for a few hours!"

Sometimes we would be given an assignment of weed-pulling to perform while the Old Man was in town with produce. Such an assignment may be interpreted in many ways and degrees. You may pull up the tallest weeds, or the two or three top classifications, or you may do a thorough job. If we had some pressing matter to attend to, such as burying a cat or building a shelter for our imaginary



army, down in the sunflower patch, we might agree to rush through the weeding job.

Next day the Old Man would be sure to catch us.

"Byes, I told ye to pull them weeds out of the caarnfield yesther-day."

"Well, we did."

"A-hay! So? Well, they grows like maypoles, arrugh! Go out now and pull them weeds, and don't miss the schmall ones. They gets big in time."

I loved to climb trees, even when there were no birds' eggs to hunt. Two favorite climbing trees were great, umbrella-shaped sycamores that shaded the horse trough, a little way south and east of the house. Birds never nested in these trees, nor, for that matter, in any other sycamore trees on our farm. The limbs were clean and straight and almost horizontal. The leaves were the largest of any in our woodlands, four or five times the size of leaves on the Oriental plane, which is the sycamore of the East.

On a hot summer day, I was climbing through the sycamores in some sort of idyllic forest game, when I saw the Old Man, almost directly below. He had come in from the field to take a refreshing taste of the cold water. I knew that I should be in serious trouble if he caught me climbing trees. Tree-climbing was not only play and a waste of time, but it was dangerous besides.

So I stood perfectly still on the nice, smooth limb, and held lightly to the limb above me. The Old Man never could see me through the thick canopy of broad leaves between us.

He removed his hat, dipped head and arms into the cool water that was running through the trough. He did it again, splashing the water over his head and the back of his neck. Then he pumped a cold drink, and drank deeply.

I lost sight of him after he stepped down from the windmill platform. The broad leaves were in my way. Had he gone back to the field? Might I now go on climbing? I couldn't hear any splashing.

Gingerly and fearsomely, I took a step farther out on the limb, to find a hole in the leafy canopy through which I might see. I

wasn't watching my step, but the ground below. A bare foot slipped on the smooth limb, and down I plunged toward the ground, thirty feet below.

Instinctively, I grasped for limbs, twigs, leaves, anything. I landed astride a limb not more than twelve feet from the ground. My quick trip through the tree had made a great crash.

Confronting me was Big Flurry, looking up from the horse trough, hat in hand, an expression of alarm and indignation on his face.

Well, I was still out of his reach, and maybe, if I could quit hurting, I might climb up higher so that he couldn't see me in my embarrassment.

He stood there, as if transfixed by horror and frustration.

Then he straightened up and shook his fist at me, shouting:

"That I may be as gray as a badger's tail before I'll be afther paying any docthor's bills for you!" The "you" was brought out with double emphasis by being pitched considerably higher than the rest of the sentence.

He put on his hat and, with shoulders bent as if under the weight of a terrible wrong, he strode away to his work. I went back to my climbing.



*We said Sir to Dad and Mam to Mother. "Yes Sir," "No Sir," "Yes Mam" and "No Mam."*

*We studied a good deal about that commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land."*

*When I talked back to Mother or ran away from Dad when he attempted to cuff me on the head, I often retired to the top of a sycamore tree and said five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys, in the hope that my days in the land would not be shortened too much.*

*Dad never had anything to say about the commandment. If the subject of religious training came up in conversation with neighbors or townies, he said, "I leaves all that to their mother."*

*But I had the feeling that I was not honoring my father when I escaped from him when he wanted to clout me on the head. I began to listen to my pulse after climbing a tree very fast, and concluded that, sure enough, my days were not going to be long in the land. My sins were catching up with me.*

*In a long and complicated series of computations, based upon the number and grievousness of my sins, I figured out my life span. I was going to drop dead while hoeing watermelons, at the age of 24.*

*Well, that would give me a long life yet, anyway. Not a glad-some existence, to be sure. All that time I would be looking forward to the hot summer day when, hoeing away around the melon vines, I would keel over on the hot sand and die.*

*I don't know why I picked on the melon patch and the age of 24. Too many equations went into the solving of the problem. But there it was, as plain as day. I decided to let the Old Man clout me next time, lest I cut down my days in the land, and presently drop dead in the pig pen.*

THE Arkansas River flowed southward through Wichita, turned eastward south of the town, and southward again at a point almost even with the eastern limits of the town. The two curves were too gentle to form an S, but they were serious enough to cause trouble in time of high water. Past our farm the river flowed southerly. On our side was no bank to speak of. On the east, the bank was high and steep, and could not be overflowed.

At the point where it passed our farm, the river was, in my early remembrance, nearly a quarter of a mile wide. When high water came, the swales in the eastern reaches of our woods were flooded. But this was land of no value, except as it might furnish a little grazing for the cattle when it wasn't too wet.

High water came with the June rains all along the watershed. We would first hear of the rise in the river from someone who had been to town. The usual report was that the Hydraulic avenue bridge was sinking in the main channel, near the south bank of the river. At this point, only a mile from our house, the river ran east and west.

The floor of the main channel was quicksand. When high water with swift current filled the channel for several days, the piling under the bridge would start sinking into the quicksand.

The wooden bridge was a quarter of a mile long, supported entirely by wooden piling. It was fun and adventure to drive over the bridge when the floor was sinking in that main channel stretch. Many horses would refuse to make the crossing, for the floor dipped steeply to a total of as much as ten feet below normal level.

No mule would put a foot on the bridge while it was in this unsafe condition. Farmers who had only mules for draft animals

were altogether out of luck. They could not take their produce to market until the bridge was repaired.

Dad would not tolerate a mule. He said it was hard enough to get along with harses, but it was clear to any man in his right mind that you couldn't teach a mule anything by beating him. Big Flurry had had a neighbor during his Butler County farming who owned mules. He was called The Dutchman. In our part of the world, where foreigners were far more scarce than primitive Indians, almost everybody who spoke with an accent was called a Dutchman. Big Flurry was an exception. It seemed evident that the term Dutchman did not fit him. He was generally alluded to as The Crazy Arishman. The first syllable of the noun was pronounced as the word are.

Dad's friend, the Dutchman, shared Big Flurry's view that all animals, women and children must be taught to obey. But a mule will obey when it seems good to him to do so.

The Dutchman had found himself at the bank of a small creek, only two miles from home, on a certain day, when he was returning from Wichita. He was driving a single mule, Cleveland by name. Heavy rains had swollen the creek to flood stage. Cleveland refused to ford the creek. His master knew that the fording would be safe, provided the mule would pull for the opposite shore in workman-like manner. Cleveland refused, despite coaxing and beating.

The Dutchman was a powerful fellow, with shoulders like those of an ox. He rushed at the balky mule, leaped into the air a few feet from its head, and landed one blow with his bare fist, back of the animal's ear.

Cleveland fell down flat, out for the count.

When he came to, he had been dragged and shoved forward until his nose was in the water. He would wake up now, or drown. Cleveland woke up, and forded the stream.

Dad always spoke admiringly of the Dutchman. That formidable individual never used horses after the incident at the ford. He raised mules, and always knocked them out with his bare fist when they balked. Big Flurry said he was not that good with his fists. He used

a singletree or a stout bit of oak scantling in administering lessons to his horses, and he wanted nothing to do with mules.

When the first great flood came down the river, Dad had me on the spring seat with him in the wagon, as we approached the bridge. We had a load of potatoes, not nearly as good potatoes as we usually produced, because the weather had been so dry. The crops were burning up.

There was a crowd on the river bank, on both sides of the road. Several wagons and buggies were stopped there, the horses tied to posts. Before we started up the rise toward the bridge, we could see the river, yellow, swirling, angry, riding high. Wreckage and trees on the surface of the water indicated that hell was loose up above.

Steve Balch stepped out into the road, held up his hand.

"Hello, Driscoll!" he said. "You can't cross today, I'm afraid. A dam has busted up in Colorado, and the river is raising holy hell. The bridge has sunk at this end so that water is running over the floor. I'm roadmaster, you know, so I'm having a sign painted, and I'm closing the bridge."

"Aye, so. A grand officer you are, Steve. 'Tis a uniform you should have. Is the bridge all right at the other end?"

"Yes, but we're not allowing anybody to drive across."

"Aye. Well, good day to you, Steve. I'm best be on me way to the market before you get your uniform. Get up, Prince, Tom, get on with it now!"

The horses hesitated, snorted, pranced, as they felt the shaky planks under them and smelled the reeking flood water. Dad swung the whip over them with a will. They walked on, bracing themselves as the wagon, which had no brake, pressed upon them in the curved descent. When we reached the stream that flowed over the floor of the dip in the bridge, they bent down their heads to sniff. Dad permitted them to take their time, but talked sternly to them.

As we started on the rise, after passing, hub-deep, through the top of the rushing flood, which was twenty feet deep below us, the crowd on the south bank let out a great cheer. Big Flurry did not look around.

He remarked to me, in what seemed cryptic language, "'Tis the King's Crowner Steve will be thinking himself soon, arrugh."

Once across the river and through a bit of overflow north of the river, we saw no further evidence of flood. On the contrary, crops were burning up in the August drought.

On these occasional trips to town with Himself, few words were spoken. Today there was an extra five cents a bushel for the potatoes, because no other farmers had got in from the south or west, and the town feared a food shortage if the flood from Colorado should continue or grow worse.

Big Flurry felt fine. He stopped the empty wagon near the corner of Main street and Douglas avenue, where there was a soft drink place, with newspapers and fruits. He took me in and ordered a five-cent milkshake for me.

To the white-aproned proprietor, an old friend, he said, "Aye, let us have a milkshake for the lad. He has earned it, ourself. 'Tis not his fault, allay, that Our Lord didn't send rain to make the potatoes bigger. But we got forty cents a bushel for them today, and I'm free with me money, same as a naygar on Saturday night. Charlie, me bye, drink it good, 'tis your pay for many a hard tug you gave to make the potatoes!"

The tradesmen all loved to hear the big Irishman talk. He belowed so loud that people came in from the sidewalk, having nothing important to do anyway. The proprietor and his help were extremely polite and agreeable. They smiled, offered suggestions, asked about the flood.

"Ah, sure 'tis a lot of noise they are making about the flood. I knew a harse in County Cork that could piss a bigger one."

The audience roared. I drank the long glass of milkshake, flavored with imitation banana, in holiday spirit. I was proud of the Old Man. He dared do things that none of the Yankees would attempt, and he could command an audience anywhere.

Across the Santa Fe tracks on Douglas avenue, before turning southward for home, we stopped outside a one-story brick building, painted green, and bearing on its shuttered windows the golden



legend: ED FAHEY'S SAMPLE ROOM. This was Old Tom Fahey's saloon. He used the name of his delicate son, Ed, on the window, by way of paternal appreciation for Ed's services as bartender.

"Hold the harses, Charlie-bye, and I'll be in here for a while," said the Boss. I sat on the high spring seat, holding the reins. As we were parked at the curb, directly in front of the saloon door, many who passed on the sidewalk looked up and grinned wisely.

Saloons were not respectable in Kansas in those days, but they were numerous, and quite profitable. Prohibition was in the state's constitution, as it still is. In its long history of struggling for perfect righteousness, Kansas has had many phases of prohibition. At this period, liquor was dispensed as in any other state, except that the saloons were called sample rooms, were shielded from the eyes of the elect by swinging shutter doors and heavy window shutters, and were not officially licensed. Instead of license fees, they paid fifty dollars a month each to the police department, and these payments were called fines. There never were any arrests, except when some poor devil was unable to pay his fine at the end of the month.

The saloons were all on the main streets, all well known, mostly owned and operated by Irishmen and Germans or their immediate descendants.

Yet there was a public conscience which held that there was something wicked, underhanded and profligate about going into a saloon and drinking a glass of beer. Dad had not the least interest in what anybody thought about it. He went in and had his beer when he wanted it and could afford to pay for it.

On this particular afternoon, he probably had several beers, for he was feeling generous toward himself and the world.

I had been holding the horses at the curb so long that I was crying softly to myself, thinking that I might never get home to Mother, when Old Tom Fahey came out the front door of the saloon, bearing in his right hand a foaming schooner of beer.

I had known Old Tom as long as I had been alive. Many a Sunday the Faheys had collared the family at Mass and compelled us, with their natural hospitality, to have noon dinner with them,

and to stay until we had to go home to feed the hogs. On the other hand, Nell Fahey, beloved young niece of Old Tom and his delicate little wife, Liza, was a regular visitor at our farm, staying weeks on end and always welcome. Old Tom and Ed were too busy about their profitable business to come out to the farm, and Liza was too delicate, but we knew them all well.

Now comes Old Tom, bearing temptation.

"Here, me bye, your father wants you to have a glass of beer, that you don't perish out here in the sun. Dhrink it, bye, and may God spare you!"

Beer? God forbid! Mother had told me many a time that saloons were the Devil's several earthly homes, that alcoholic drink was damnation in liquid form, that Grandpa Brown had the right idea, and that John should be the model for all the family.

I loathed the smell of beer. You caught it every time you passed before the Senate Health Resort, a prominent sample room on Douglas avenue, near the Manhattan Hotel, and every time you drove by the Carey Hotel Bar.

It was a mystery how such vile stuff could be vended to an innocent public by such fine families as we knew the Faheys, Mahans, Gettos and Schnitzlers to be.

By the time you had reached the age of reason, you realized that there were many things you were never going to understand. So I didn't try to fit into my picture of a God-made world the squat figure of Old Tom Fahey, his little chin whisker bobbing with good will, as he approached me with the schooner of beer.

I said, "No, thank you, Mr. Fahey, I don't drink beer."

"Ah, sure, there's nothing so good for you on a hot day as a good glass of cold beer. Dhrink it now, in the Name of God! 'Twill make a man of you if you dhrink enough of it. A glass of beer never harmed man or beast. Dhrink, bye!"

Embarrassed beyond expression, I nevertheless continued to refuse. The old man argued with me until the beer went flat in the hot sun. Just as he was pouring it into the gutter, Dad appeared at the front door of the saloon, wiping his whiskers on his sleeve.

"What now?" he asked Fahey.

"Sure, the bye won't dhrink a fine schooner of cold beer, and he roasting in the sun!"

"Well, his mother tells him not to be dhrinking. But so far as I can see, there is no sense in turning down a free glass of cold beer on a day like this. There is sense in everything, but there is more sense in scratching your arse than in tearing it to pieces."

This was one of Big Flurry's favorite bits of philosophy. It was his way of expressing a counsel of moderation. It seemed most apposite now.

In fatherly discouragement with the stubborn virtue of his son, the Old Man went back to the bar to discuss the reports of heavier flood waters coming down from Colorado. There had been stories in the papers about it, the customers at the bar said.

The sun was far gone in the cloudless western sky when we weighed anchor in front of Fahey's Sample Room. Big Flurry was in a mellow mood, but flushed with his drinks. He stopped at a grocery store and bought me a dime's worth of hard candy. I had no stomach for it. My long vigil in the sun had blistered my bare feet, which had been perched on the rim of the wagonbox, and I was generally miserable. I really wanted another milkshake, but did not dare suggest it.

We drove homeward in silence. Half a mile north of the bridge, we forded a swift stream of overflow water. This had not been here in the morning. Even I could tell that there had been a considerable rise during the day.

In the sandhills north of the river we saw the two island families, the Pattersons and Kongles, encamped. Harry Kongle, a pleasant, clean-faced young man of twenty, came to the roadside and said, "You can't cross the bridge, Mr. Driscoll; they've closed it."

"Aye? Did you rescue your hand-organ, Harry, I don't know?"

Dad shared the community's contempt for Harry, because Harry had saved the money he made digging sweet potatoes for neighboring farmers, and had invested it in a hand-organ, such as were played by Italians with monkeys.

Harry said yes, he had brought the musical instrument out with the other family effects.

"You'm best go and play a chune on it, so," replied Big Flurry, closing the conversation and clucking a go signal to the horses.

When we reached the north end of the bridge we found a rope stretched across, with a sign: "Bridge Closed," dangling in the middle.

Dad got down from the wagon, giving me the reins. He untied the rope from one side of the bridge, bade me drive over it and stop. The team and wagon past the barrier, Big Flurry carefully replaced the rope and sign, then walked ahead of the horses while I drove slowly along the bridge.

When we came to the south channel, it was evident that the floor and piling had sunk much farther than they had when we were on our way into town. There was still a crowd on the south bank, but not all concentrated on the roadway. A group of twenty or more farmers was throwing up a makeshift levee with spades, on the Jonathan Balch farm, west of the highway. The water had begun to overflow there.

We could hear shouts, but because of the roar of the flood water we could not distinguish the words that were being hurled at us. It was plain enough, however, that we were being warned.

Dad had me stop the team on the verge of the dip, while he waded out into the stream that was flowing over the depressed bridge floor. He walked to the middle of the dip, holding to the right bridge rail. He seemed satisfied.

The Boss paid no attention to the shouting farmers, but climbed into the spring seat and took the reins. He guided the horses to the upstream or right side of the bridge, and, with a flick of the whip, put them into the stream that was rushing across the dip.

The horses snorted and didn't like the adventure at first. Once in the water, they seemed to have only one idea—to reach dry land. They pulled as fast as they could, drifting sharply to the left with the current.

Just as we began the ascent on the land side, the drift to the left became so violent that the left rear hub of the wagon struck an upright timber of the bridge rail. Dad pulled sharply on the right rein and shouted at the horses. We were safely back in the roadway

of the bridge, and close to land, when the railing, weakened by the current and general displacement, and given its final blow by the wagon hub, toppled into the roaring stream and floated away.

Our rear wheels had barely touched dry land when the whole section of bridge, from the shore clear across the main channel, collapsed with a roar into the flood. One of the spectators on the south bank had removed the rope barrier at this end of the bridge for us; else we never would have made it.

There was a shout from the crowd on the bank and along the levee. Some of the loafers and flood-watchers on the roadway shouted such banalities as, "That was a close call, Driscoll!" and "Ain't you scared?" Big Flurry paid them no heed, did not even greet them. He kept the horses moving.

Neither then nor afterward did he ever volunteer any conversation on our narrow escape. We drove home in customary silence. I was full of talk when we reached home, detailing the grand adventure to all who would listen. When Dad came in to supper, Mother welcomed him with the suggestion that we should all thank God for this delivery from the jaws of death. "Another minute, and you both would have been lost!"

"Aye, it was not to be," said Big Flurry. And that was all he ever said about the incident.

Next day came news, via Ves Booher on pony-back, that the river had broken through the frail levee the farmers had been building with spades and shovels, and that the overflow water, though not deep, was gradually spreading down the road toward Steve Balch's north forty.

This was the sandy plot west of our farm, across which I had made my historic trek when I was lost.

From our west yard we could see a gang of men with teams, at the farther end of the Balch tract, throwing up a levee. Dad walked the quarter of a mile through the sweet potato field that now occupied the tract. Water from the slop-over at the river bank, a quarter of a mile away, was stealing down the road, and a trickle of it already was appearing through the hedge in the low corner of the sweet potato field. Steve and his men were walling off the low

section with a hastily constructed ridge. Steve said he didn't mind losing the three or four acres that would be flooded on the other side of this ridge, but he didn't want the water running through all the trenches, lest it rot the sweet potatoes.

"Well," said Dad, "God knows I'd like to borrow a little of that fine wather so I could have a dhrop of it on me thirsty land beyant the hedge there. The caarn there is burning up. I could maybe lead a little trench from the overflow here, and relieve you of some of the wather, since you don't seem to like it at all."

"Go ahead, Driscoll, you're welcome to all the damn stuff you can use!" shouted Steve. It seemed that he had the situation under control, and he would be glad to relieve the pressure on his little dyke by having some water drawn off around the north end of the ridge and led away, to soak into the parched ground.

After the noon meal, Dad hitched young Prince and old Tom to a walking plow, and took me along for the adventure. Starting near the hastily constructed Balch dike, the Boss deepened an east-west trench to carry off some of the overflow. Steve's low four acres were flooded, but the rest of the land was scorching and dry.

As the furrow lengthened, a trickle of flood water followed it. I worked with a hoe, making the trench smooth where clods fell back and blocked the feeble stream.

We were half way down the field, with a mere cupful of water at our heels, when we heard shouting in the direction of the Balch gang. Men were unhitching horses from plows and listers, and driving them like mad for the higher ground of The Sandhill. Steve's lusty yell reached us easily, though we couldn't tell what he was saying.

By the time we had got a good look at the scene it was easy to see what the matter was. A great sea of yellow water was spreading over the land between us and the highway. By the time Dad had unhitched the horses from the plow and done up the lines, the trenches all around us were full of water. We saw the last of the Balch workers floundering through the flood to the hill as Dad boosted me to old Tom's back with admonition to throw away the hoe and stick tight. The horses were no longer connected by the

driving reins, but Dad, mounting Prince, took Tom's checkrein in his left hand, and we started for our farm and the hill upon which our house stood.

Tops of the sweet potato ridges were disappearing under water before we had gone ten yards. You couldn't make the horses go faster than a walk in this sand, now softened by flood water. But the horses knew they were fleeing from danger, and they walked fast, ears up.

The dividing line between our farm and Balch's was still half a city block away when the water reached the horses' bellies, and the going became slower. Old Tom was floundering a bit, sometimes missing the trench and slipping off the ridge. We were making directly for the opening Dad had made in the barbed wire fence, when he had come through with team and plow, so short a time ago. The yellow flood was swirling now, with that sad, sinister, threatening sound that I was to hear so many times before I saw the last of the Valley farm.

Tom was lagging, and it was obvious that the horses would have to swim when the flood should rise only a few more inches. Dad stopped his horse and mine.

"We'm best let Tom swim for himself," said the Old Man. "You stand up on his back and jump across to Prince's back. He's strong and soople, and he can take the both of us home.

"Good, now. Gimme your hand as you jump, and don't miss."

This was sport. I had been jumping since I could walk, and had got many a whack on the side of the head for practicing jumps instead of pulling weeds. In a moment I landed lightly on Prince's wide hips, and sat astride him, behind Dad.

When we started up, Prince was swimming.

The gap in the boundary fence, and the fence itself, had disappeared under the yellow flood, and I could see that Dad's only fear was that Prince would entangle his legs in the barbed wire. Nice calculation from a hedge tree that was sticking out of the water made the navigation safe, and we were on our way across the flooded field for which Dad had gone seeking water.

Old Tom was bravely breasting the flood, but gradually falling

farther behind. The water was rising fast, and the current a hundred yards west of our hill swept us considerably off our course.

Prince was puffing hard, but proud of his victory, when he stepped out of the water, on to the very dry soil of the hill. Tom made it a few minutes later.

I jumped down from the horse immediately, and Dad turned his mount to view the flood.

He shook his right fist at the sky and shouted in a complaining defiance: "Good God Almighty, Pathrick and Paul, a dhrop of wather for me thirsty land, is it?"

Slowly he rode off to see what had become of the cattle and the lowland fields.





*Big Flurry's relations with God were on a direct and business-like basis.*

*Many years after the nearly fatal illness, when the Old Man was planning to leave the farm, he gave as one of his reasons for the move, "I promised God that I'd never be sick on this place agin." Just why he had made such a rash promise, he did not make clear.*

*He frequently called upon God to act as witness to the truth or intent of a statement.*

*"If that's not true, God sthrike me dead!" he would say.*

*Or he would talk directly to God, demanding or requesting certain attention from the All Highest.*

*"God Almighty, look at that, will you!" he would shout, when he saw a skunk carrying away a squawking chicken or millions of bugs eating up his wheat. The tone was one of injured innocence, as if gently calling the Lord's attention to something He should have prevented.*

*He used a brief form of curse, calling down the most terrible fate upon almost anybody, and upon what seemed to me to be slight provocation.*

*I fell flat on my face one day, while running after a cow.*

*"That you mightn't risel!" shouted my father.*

*He asked where John was. Gone to town, I told him.*

*"That he mightn't return!" he said, solemnly.*

*We boys did not take this kind of anathema seriously. We doubted that God would listen to any of the Old Man's curses or demands, since Big Flurry wasn't going to church any more.*

JOHN was the first-born. Mother had spent the first three years of her marriage praying for a child. She never ceased being thankful for John. Big Flurry, during the time in which I had a chance to observe him, held an altogether different point of view.

Dad nourished a glowing hatred against John during the eldest son's youth and young manhood. What elements entered into the smoldering dislike and contempt, nobody could enumerate, least of all Dad or John. Certainly, the Old Man concluded, early in the boy's life, that John had come between Big Flurry and his wife. As time went on, and the rift between the marriage partners widened, Dad often shouted accusingly at Mother, "You let the children come betwixt us!" By "the children," he generally meant John. The Old Man suffered under the scourging conviction that the eldest son had stolen away whatever affection his pretty wife had had for him. Undoubtedly, the disappointed wife did look upon her first child as consolation for a marriage she had never desired. Throughout her life, this son was to stand as her champion, however ineffective, in opposition to the man she had married against her will.

John early took to American ways, American language, and was altogether uninterested in Ireland, the Old Man's Irish cronies, and tales of Ireland's sufferings. He admired well-dressed, prosperous, respectable Americans, imitated their speech and ways of expressing themselves, so far as was within his power.

As soon as he settled in Kansas, Big Flurry realized that he was an alien, destined to remain an alien, regardless of naturalization papers. After he moved to the Valley farm, he hadn't even Mike Downey to talk to. He passed more and more days without speaking

to anyone save his horses. To them he issued orders, rebukes, and a rare "Well done!"

While John was working on the farm, his father gave him orders, but that was all. Within my experience, the two never had a friendly conversation. When they worked together, haying, harvesting, stacking wheat or driving cattle, there was perfect silence between them, except for a curt order from Himself at rare intervals.

They did not speak the same language.

Mother said that Dad was hard on poor John. The Old Man, not knowing his own strength, worked like a slave. According to Mother, he was both Uncle Tom and Simon Legree. A hard worker, he was a hard taskmaster.

As to the justice of the charge, I do not know. John was fifteen years old when I was born. When I was seven years old, and beginning to notice matters pertaining to the farm work, John was a grown man, a voter, already reaching for worlds beyond the farm and the Valley.

Mother and the elder girls usually referred to him as Poor John, and we boys learned to make use of the expression in a mildly mocking manner, for it seemed to us that Poor John had just about everything, and the rest of us comparatively little.

There was a legend in the family, thoroughly believed and sadly promulgated by Mother, that John was an artist, condemned to follow the plow when he should have been painting pictures along with the masters. How much of truth was in this story, nobody ever knew. During the years of my life with him, Poor John never touched brush to canvas, never drew a picture.

Early in boyhood, John had shown a tendency to draw. The doting mother talked with his schoolteacher in an Erie school about this. The teacher encouraged her to believe that John probably could develop artistic talent.

Somehow, out of the poverty that must have made itself felt in daily life, Mother bought drawing materials, paints, water colors, brushes, a palette, an easel, all the trappings of an art student. The boy was clever with his hands. He built a box to contain his materials. It was neatly and firmly fashioned of a light wood, about

three and a half feet square and a foot deep, provided with a cover that fitted over the top three inches of the box as exactly as the cover fits a baking powder can.

During the Erie period of his life, and especially while his father was in the West, working at the beginnings of a new home, John made progress in art. In the parlor of the Valley farm were three exhibits, used to amaze the neighbors and to back up the theory that Poor John had been cheated by a cruel fate of his chance to make good in his own profession.

One of these was an oil painting, on canvas. During most of the Valley farm life, it was unframed, tacked to the lath backing on which it had been stretched for painting. It stood on a tall easel, painted red, in the northeast corner of the room. When Mother was well along in years, she found enough money to have that Early Driscoll framed in a deep, heavily gilded frame, and then it was hung on the parlor wall.

This was a picture of a brick-red cross, dominating a sylvan scene. At the base of the cross, an enormous open book. On the left-hand open page, the word Holy; on the right, Bible.

There were two portraits, in colors, on glass. The glass was slightly convex, and was set into a plush frame. In an oval opening in a lemon-colored square plush frame was a pastel portrait of Handel, the composer, who, it seems, had a wealth of white ringlets, or else wore a magnificent wig that had them.

In a raspberry frame of the same shape and dimensions, was a portrait of Big Flurry in his wedding clothes, seated in a photographer's chair. I believe that was the only portrait of Dad I ever saw. It was handsome.

The portraits were done by some sort of transfer process that was popular in those days, and, of course, were no criterion of the boy's artistic ability. But the Kansas neighbors had never seen anything of the kind. Those portraits, by whatever process achieved, bolstered the neighborhood verdict that John Driscoll, while not much of a farmer, might have been a great artist if he had had a chance.

The teacher had said that a boy with so much talent should go

to Paris to study art. All during the Erie period there was a secret hope, shared by mother and son, that somehow, some way, God would provide means whereby John could go to Paris and become a great painter.

When the move to Kansas was made for good and all, John put his artistic career behind him with a finality that brooked no questioning. The scores of oil paint tubes, dozens of crayons and art pencils, tablets and blocks of drawing paper, dozens of brushes and art pens, and even the little bottle of turpentine and the erasers, were packed neatly into the neat box, and laid away forever. During all my life on the farm, that box, painted black with white stripes near the top, occupied the one shelf at the top of the closet in John's room. Woe to the culprit who should be caught violating that memento of unfulfilled promise! Though we younger boys often had to "borrow" pencils and paper from the teachers at the country school, we were never permitted to take anything out of Poor John's art box. If we were recovering from a severe illness, which, luckily enough, we often were, the box might be pulled down for us to contemplate. But it was always put back in place before John came into the house. He would, we understood, be hurt beyond measure if he knew that any member of his family had looked into that past which spelled frustration.

Never did I hear John speak of his art, of the career he missed, of his boyhood ambition, or, indeed, of art in general. If the subject was raised, as when neighbors admired the portraits in the plush frames, John rubbed his chin with his right palm, and was silent. If the conversation persisted, he left the room.

The rest of the family never talked about John's art when he was present. It was a melancholy subject, and John was supposed to be endowed with a sensitivity altogether in harmony with the character of a great artist.

I have since observed that it is not at all unusual for a boy or girl to show talent for drawing and a yearning for art during adolescence, only to put the brushes away and forget all about it when the interests of young manhood or young womanhood shove

aside all else. But still, John may have had unusual talent. He was always clever with his hands.

During his youth, John's artistic talents manifested themselves in another direction. He became interested in cabinet-making. His great creative *tour de force* was a combination bookcase and desk of the type that was called a secretary. He made drawings and specifications. Somehow, he obtained the essential lumber and tools. He must have spent months of spare time in fashioning, matching, sandpapering and polishing the wood of that desk. Every piece was perfect.

The parts of the desk, polished but not stained, lay in the attic above "the hall" during my boyhood. John laid them away, along with his art. Nobody ever spoke of the bookcase. Nobody ever asked Poor John why he didn't finish that gorgeous piece of furniture. In the attic the pieces gathered dust. When all the family was away, Van and I sometimes stood on a chair in the hall, lifted up the trap door, and ascended into the attic, which had no floor. We would brush the thick dust off the slick pieces of wood and talk about how we would love to have that tall bookcase, and books to fill its several shelves.

I couldn't refrain from asking Mother, within the next day or so, "Do you suppose John will ever finish the bookcase?"

"There now, you've been up in the attic! How many times have I told you not to go into the attic? You'll kill yourself or come through the ceiling."

"No," I lied, "but I remember the bookcase from the last time I was up there; you know, when the chimney was afire and I went up to see if the timbers were smoking. That bookcase would sure look fine in the southeast corner of the dining room, wouldn't it? John has lots of time on rainy days, when he just shaves or sits and stares into space. Why doesn't he finish it?"

Mother looked far beyond me, into the past and her faded hopes. "No, Poor John will never touch the bookcase again. And don't let him know that you were up there, looking at it."

John was a quiet, unobtrusive, religious young man, much given

to reverie, but never a great reader or an earnest student. People said of him, "John is a good boy," and, later on, "John is a fine man." But he seemed to spend much time in daydreaming, and early acquired the habit of "talking to himself." That is to say, he talked to imaginary individuals or audiences, when he was alone. He made grand, eloquent speeches. We boys used to make a game of eavesdropping on these talks, and then imitating John for each other's amusement. On a rainy day, when he was supposed to be oiling the harness in the granary, one could slip up behind that thin-walled structure, sit on an old plow, and hear John "making up speeches" to make to his girl in town.

"Some girls," he intoned in a rich, melodramatic tone, "Some girls . . ." There would be a pause, and some jingling of harness. Then the show resumed.

There might be a dozen false starts, in different tones, as there are during radio show-building bouts in advertising agencies today. Then, in a fine flow of eloquence: "Some girls do not possess sufficient brains to appreciate a man for his manhood, but they admire a fop for his folly."

There would be many intonations of the final, crushing phrase. Evidently, there was some friction in the love life of the moment, and the city girl had been admiring a fop for his folly. John was not handy with the girls. Nearly every courting experiment he undertook ended in some sort of quarrel. We boys heard of these things only indirectly. John told no one but Mother. Sometimes she became so indignant over the way a girl had treated her son that she pretended not to see the young lady next time she met her in church or at the dry goods store.

A common saying in the family was "John's best girl is his mother. She's about the only one he takes anywhere." I have heard the same expression used in many families of Irish origin, where the tradition of devotion to mother on the part of the eldest son, though it deprive the son of a natural life and career, is strongly ingrained.

John retained skill in his hands, all through his life. As a young man, he was an expert bundle-pitcher at harvest time and in stacking



or threshing. It takes a certain twist of the wrist, and a pride in your work, to toss bundles of wheat to the top of a stack, and never miss or fall short. John could do it. Even Dad preferred to have John pitch to him, when he was building stacks.

When John was full-grown, he was about five feet, nine inches tall, or a little less than that. He had something of the Driscoll nose, but otherwise resembled his mother. His eyes were smaller than those of most of the family. They were blue, and were given a sort of inquiring expression by a habit John had of arching his eyebrows, as if trying to open the eyes wider. In many cases, when John did not have a ready reply, he would answer by arching his eyebrows. In time, this habit arched the brows and wrinkled the forehead into a kind of mildly surprised expression.

James J. Corbett became an American hero when he defeated John L. Sullivan for the championship of the world in the prize ring when John was twenty-two. As was natural enough, the young man on the Kansas farm idolized the prizefighter who was known as Gentleman Jim. He went at once to the barber and had his hair cut in Corbett brush pompadour style, and thus he wore it for the rest of his life. The hair was dark and coarse and inclined to be curly.

At this stage of his career, John used to read the fights, blow by blow and round by round, to the entire family, whether anybody wanted to listen or not. He bought the *Eagle* with the fight reports when he went to church on the Sunday following the fight. He practiced posing with arms and fists in Corbett positions. He never fought, but one gained the impression that he would be a holy terror if ever he should light into any adversary.

Margaret used to say, "John is patient, but beware the wrath of a patient man."

There were few virtues that were not commonly imputed to John by the women of the family. When handsome young men were being discussed, as handsome young men ever have been discussed by women, the two sisters agreed that you couldn't exactly call John handsome. Margaret expressed the verdict that was accepted and applauded by Mother and Marie: "John is good-looking

in the sense of looking good. Anybody would know by looking at him that John is an awfully good boy."

John attended school in Erie, and, after the family moved west, went to a one-room country school in Butler County. He did a year or two at one-room Riverside school after the family moved to the Valley.

His last teacher at Riverside was Miss Corwin, who wore a big bustle and owned a set of the *Essays of Thomas Babington Macaulay*, in huge volumes of fine print, bound in brown cloth. John, never a reader or student in later life, was captivated by the resounding periods of Macaulay. The essayist was known to be violently anti-Catholic. But we had learned to take anti-Catholicism along with thistles, cockleburs and measles. John could be trusted to sift heresy from truth. He found much to admire in the bombastic and flowery essays that Macaulay seems to have written for sound effect rather than for sense.

Although Macaulay hated the Church, he couldn't resist saying sententious things about its glories, because there are so many fine, long vowels and liquid consonants in any well-turned sentence about Catholicism.

The Holy Roman Catholic Church, Macaulay said, was mighty before Saxon had set foot in Britain. It was so-and-so when the camelopard bounded in the Roman arena.

John learned all this by heart, but he had nobody to tell him how to pronounce the words. So he had the cameo-leopard bounding in the Roman arena. At that, he was as close to the truth as Macaulay. Camelopard is a fancy old name for a giraffe, and giraffes do not bound in anybody's arena. Macaulay probably didn't bother to look up the camelopard in the dictionary. He knew it sounded fine in a grandiloquent paragraph, and so he shot it to the printer.

The essay went on to say that the Church will still be powerful when some traveler from New Zealand takes his stand upon a broken arch of the London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's. This was rather daring of Mr. Macaulay. In those days nobody else in the world could picture to himself St. Paul's in ruins or the Bridge with broken arches.

John committed whole pages of this stuff to memory and fired it off at the horses when he was cultivating corn. He opened his mouth wide and let out the words "Holy Roman Catholic Church" with such lengthening of the o's that the horses, willing to justify a little dawdling, mistook the sounds for the familiar "Whoa!" and stopped dead in their tracks. John did not urge them on, but took advantage of the pause to disengage his hands for gesturing. This went on for several seasons after Miss Corwin had left the school and had got her book back.

In the house, after supper, if Dad happened to be out at the stable, John would bring up the subject of the Church and its glorious history, and would presently spout the whole of the tribute by Mr. Macaulay. He would be so deeply affected by the sound of his rolling vowels that tears would be running down his cheeks when he finished and went upstairs to bed.

Generally, evenings around the dining room in winter were spent in silence, each member of the family doing his own reading, studying or sewing. Sometimes there was an exceptionally interesting article to be read aloud by John. Big Flurry customarily kept to himself, in brooding majesty, beside the kitchen stove. He liked to smoke a pipe or cigar during an evening, and it was somehow understood that one did not smoke in any part of the house except the kitchen.

We did not require that our news be hot off the press. One of our friends in town gave to Van and me his used copies of the *Youth's Companion*. The *Sunday Eagle*, purchased for a nickel when there was that much money to spare on Sundays, furnished reading matter for part of the family for a week, and the *Weekly Kansas City Star*, at a quarter a year, was especially valuable because of its feature stories, its "Starbeams" column, and its editorial page tales of Kansas history.

Van and I, reading something that seemed of general interest, would pipe up, "It says here that somebody baked a pie so big that it took six horses to move it!"

John would lower the paper he had been reading idly, reach out his right hand, and say, "Lessee." This was patois for "Let us see."

This, coming from John, was a command, not a mere suggestion or request.

We handed over the paper or magazine for John to see for himself the interesting item. He would read it, grinning appreciatively, and then continue with other items. He knew that the younger brother was patiently waiting for him to hand back the paper, but he never handed it back. He pretended to become so absorbed in the deeply interesting publication that he forgot the paper had merely been borrowed.

This practice was so common that it became a bitter joke among us. "I was reading the *Star*, but John lesseed it," one would say to the other. But neither dared suggest to John that he wanted his paper returned, or that the practice of lesseeing was distasteful to us.

We boys had no rights that John was expected to respect. But we devised a scheme to frustrate the lessee practice. We would see John reading a publication that we wanted. John would not divide up the *Star*, but kept the whole paper to himself until he wanted something else. The rest of us were accustomed to dividing the papers into sheets or sections and sharing them around.

So, one of us would burst out laughing at some trivial item in the paper we happened to be reading. John would look up, hold out his hand, and command, "Lessee!"

We would hand it over and take John's paper, which he would drop to read the item that had made us laugh.

This scheme worked only a few times. When John saw through the plot, he simply held on to his own paper, along with the lesseed publication.

Van, always more independent and assertive of rights than I, ventured to growl a protest against the lessee system two or three times. John looked over the edge of the lesseed paper at the saucy culprit, arched his eyebrows questioningly, and sucked air through the teeth on the right side of his mouth, making a loud and ominous noise. This was a sign that further protest would not be tolerated.

Dad was a good audience for any news of the sea. Our inland newspapers, when we happened to get hold of one, had little or nothing of marine news. But Aunt Fannie sometimes sent old

copies of the Erie *Evening Herald*, with news of arrivals and departures of lake boats, together with press reports of wrecks at sea. The boy from Roaring Water Bay listened to all of this intently, remarking, from time to time, "So? Hay, hay! Aye, 'tis so indade!"

A great news sensation, dragged out over a period of a week or more, was the supposed loss at sea and subsequent safe arrival of a French ship, *La Gascogne*. When she arrived in port, sheathed in ice, she created a national sensation to which nothing in our day of radio and wholesale death is comparable.

The Faheys took the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, St. Louis *Republic*, New York *World*, New York *Herald*, and other city papers. They turned over to us at irregular intervals bundles of these city papers, often unopened. Out of these, especially the New York *Herald*, John read aloud the sensational story of *La Gascogne* from day to day.

It mattered not that he called the ship Lay Gas-ko-jeen. Who knew the difference? Big Flurry thought it was fine, for once, to have a scholarly son, who could read off as though he were a professor. And, to make the family occasion perfect, the Old Man would volunteer to correct John on a nautical pronunciation now and again, insisting upon the saltwater pronunciation of starboard, halyards, ratlines, foremast and forecandle. Landsmen always mispronounce these words, even though they be scholars.

In summer, of course, there was no family gathering after supper. It was late, for daylight held long, and the household must be astir early in the morning. As soon as the dishes were cleared away, the men-folk set about their final night chores, and when those were completed, everybody went to bed.

On winter evenings in my very early childhood, Mother used to read aloud to Dad from the Big Book. This was a thick tome of some 700 large pages, put out in the Centennial year of 1876 to sell to farmers by subscription. It was entitled "Great Events of Our Past Century," and contained some 88 accounts of highlights in the nation's news, from the signing of the Declaration of Independence to the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

All the great battles of the War of 1812 and the Civil War were

described in harrowing details and in flowery, florid language. The doings of Pirate Gibbs, the loss of the steamship *Arctic*, and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln were related in many gory paragraphs.

Mother held me on her lap while she read these tales of horror in the evening. She thought I was too young to listen or remember. Remember? More than half a century later I wake up screaming from nightmares depicting the Battle of New Orleans, the Battle of Antietam, the killing of Hamilton by Burr, the fight of the *Monitor* and *Merrimac*, the murder of Dr. George Parkman, or some other bloody doings that were planted in my consciousness during those readings. I used to howl so loudly that Mother thought I had colic. In reality, I was frightened out of my wits by tales of yellow fever, appearance of a comet in the heavens, Battle of Bull Run, or the death of George Washington.

The two or three tales of pirates and mutiny at sea impressed me most forcefully, and left the most vivid pictures on my mind. I lived to write more pirate stories than any other person has ever written. A psychiatrist might find something here.

In those days there was a veritable plague of weekly and monthly publications manufactured in and near Augusta, Maine. The king-pin was a sort of tabloid called *Comfort—The Key to a Million Homes*. All the others seemed to be imitations of *Comfort*.

*Comfort* probably did reach a million homes. It was sent free of charge. That was before the days of Audit Bureau of Circulations, and long before federal overlordship of circulations and advertising. I do not remember that *Comfort* ever tried to collect the nominal sum listed as its subscription price. But many of its imitators carried on a profitable blackmail operation upon innocent farmers. They sent threatening letters to the innocent customers, demanding payment and threatening suit and heavy damages. Their story was that if you accepted the paper from the mailman, you thereby obligated yourself to payment of the subscription fee. It was exactly the same contention, from a legal point of view, as is still made by restaurants that charge extra for bread and butter that you do not order. I believe it was a Kansas court that put the kibosh on the bread-and-butter

racket, sensibly holding that you do not have to pay for anything that you do not order, whether you use it or not.

We were often bludgeoned by racketeers for money alleged to be due for magazines from Augusta, which we had never ordered. We held family conferences over the threatening letters, but were advised by John, the Lawyer, to cease worrying, since we owed nothing. Meantime, we read *Comfort*, and got good recipes out of it.

On a bitter winter night, Mother started reading to Dad a wild serial story in *Comfort*. It was a forerunner of the Perils of Pauline. It included all the cliff-hanging and tying on railroad tracks that you still get in the movies and on the air. The formula has changed only with the advance of mechanical invention, so that the airplane is now a factor and the buggy is eliminated.

Big Flurry listened to this recital with obvious excitement. He would interrupt occasionally with, "The divvill! See now, what that God-damned Orangeman would do to her! Glory be to God, 'tis too bad the sheriff didn't take care to shoe his harse before he started out!"

The Old Man would take pains to be available for reading aloud whenever *Comfort* was in the mail. The serial became more and more complicated. The villain was retreating into the brush with the heroine, shooting blindly as he ran, pursued by a posse of virtuous citizens who dared not fire for fear of killing the beautiful daughter of the farmer.

Next week, *Comfort* was missing. This probably was a part of the circulation manager's campaign, but we supposed the magazine had been lost in the mail. It was a rainy Saturday anyway, so Dad saddled a horse and rode to town. He carried with him the masthead of *Comfort*, and was told to ask for it at the newsstand near the corner of Main street and Douglas avenue.

Big Flurry returned in a glum mood.

"Did you find the magazine?" Mother asked.

"I did nat. When I couldn't get it at the newsstand, I went to Gus Sauer to see could he get it for me somewhere. He tells me that there's not a word of thruth in that damned story. He says

they makes up the whole thing, every word of it. No such a gaarl ever lived, says he. I thought before God he must be wrong, so I went to Fred Ross and Pat Gould and McGowan, and they all tells me the same thing. Faith, they laughed at me for believing it. 'Tis damn fools we all are to be believing anything we reads in the papers. Thanks be to God, I never spent much time listening to them."

There was explaining to be done. Dad suspected that the family had known all along that the story was untrue, a cheat, and a fraud, and had withheld the information from him for some sinister purpose. Margaret explained that the story was fiction, and that fiction was partly true and partly imaginary.

"To hell with it all!" cried Big Flurry. "I won't be damning me soul listening to a pack of God-damned lies!"

It was on a short after-supper evening in spring that John told, for the thousand-and-first time, according to Van's estimate, the story of the Curse of Father McCabe. The priest was a holy man indeed, but he lost his temper once, when a saloonkeeper struck him in an argument over finances.

John stood with his feet wide apart, near the head of the table, as he orated the story, with gestures. He had been practicing it that day, out in the field. The horses probably knew it by heart, as we did.

"That saloonkeeper probably was drunk when he got into the argument with poor Father McCabe. Anyway, he forgot himself; so far forgot himself that he struck the priest.

"Father McCabe did not attempt to defend himself. He merely said to the saloonkeeper, 'You will never use that arm again.' The arm dropped to the man's side, withered and helpless."

John was so overcome by this emotional recital that his voice shook toward the end of it, and there were tears in his eyes. He went up to bed at once, though it was earlier than the usual bedtime.

The family had listened to the elocutionary outburst in embarrassed silence, its regular life and work suspended. Everybody had heard the story many times, and there was no apparent reason for



bringing it up at this time. Why should anybody be emotionally upset about a saloonkeeper's arm that had long been dust? Still, no member of the family ever dared make such a suggestion to John. It was considered compulsory to listen to his recitals, and none would think of interrupting with the very sensible and appropriate remark, "Oh, say, we've heard that one before! Let's talk about something else."

In later years, when Van and I were away at school at least part of the time, we would tell stories when we were at home. If John liked a story, he would re-tell it. Sometimes he would recite it to Van and me the very next day after one of us had told it to him. It mattered not that we were bored by this exercise. John was entertaining himself.

Emboldened by my worldly experience, I once interrupted a story. "Yes, I told that to you yesterday, don't you remember?"

John hesitated only a moment, then continued as though there had been no interruption, laughing heartily at his climax, while I scowled uneasily.

After John had gone to bed, following his recital about the saloonkeeper's withered arm, Van and I got books to read and the women started clearing off the table in embarrassed silence.

Margaret broke the silence, saying, "Poor John gets awfully upset. He is so intense and so earnest. He is an awfully good man, and I guess the very thought that anybody would strike a priest is too much for him."

Everybody admitted that John was awfully good. He never smoked, chewed tobacco, drank liquor or kept company seriously with any but the finest of girls of the most religious families. The only swearing he ever did about the house was "By hell!" This expression was used in such sentences as this: "I'll bet, by hell, the cattle are in the corn!" When John said "by hell," the family knew that something very serious was afoot.

In later years, he swore at the horses. He swore so loud and so long that he could be heard by the neighbors on a calm day. He sang his oaths and imprecations in a sort of wild-man chant. Mother several times walked a quarter of a mile to the headland to tell him

to stop that swearing before all the Protestant neighbors. John just grinned and said all right, he'd stop.

John was the only member of the family who refused even to taste Dad's wine. Dad had gone to a great deal of trouble to make the wine from his Concord grapes, and he was proud of the flavor and bouquet. John smelled it and put down his glass.

"If you dhrink it it might make a man of you," said Big Flurry.

"No, thanks," said John, and walked away.

The rest of us were extremely temperate in the use of the wine, and drank a little only to please the Old Man when he brought up a water pitcher full of it on a hot afternoon, or on a Sunday. Dad liked to have someone drink wine with him. He became so sociable, during his wine-making years, that he often invited one of the neighbors to come and share a pitcher with him.

When Mother was run down and weak, or recuperating from illness, John sometimes went to Mahan's wholesale house in Wichita and got a case of beer for her. The Mahans were old friends of the family, and on these rare occasions were happy to furnish the beer at a nominal price, case and bottles to be returned.

The beer was kept in a dark corner of the cellar. We had no ice in summer, except when we bought a dime's worth on Sunday to make ice cream, but the cellar was cool and the beer was very palatable, Mother said.

"I confess I like it," she said. "I'm glad I don't have the temptation often, or I might get to like it too well."

John would come in from hoeing watermelons in the field, on a hot afternoon, and get out a bottle of beer for Mother. Beer bottles were corked in those days. John would draw the cork with great skill and as much ceremony as though there were not more than two successful uncorkers in the whole world.

While he was admiring Mother's pleasure in her glass of beer, he would sometimes pour a glass for himself. He wanted to see whether that St. Louis brewery was keeping up the quality of its product. He would smack his lips and talk of the body and flavor, the hops and yeast, and the tonic effect it was sure to have on Mother's health. If he had not taken this glass, it might have gone

flat in the bottle, and John didn't want Mother drinking flat beer.

Neither John nor Mother liked to have the rest of the family know about John's taking these furtive tastes of beer. It chanced that I came in from taking a bottle of water to Dad in the fields and found John drinking his little portion with Mother. John was visibly embarrassed, since his record was supposed to be perfect. Realizing this, I would pretend I had not seen, and would take to cutting down weeds with the hoe.

John was shirking his work in the fields, and Dad surely would be angry if he found it out. So I substituted for him, in a manner of speaking, in the business of destroying weeds. True, these weeds were in the yard and John's weeds were in the fields. But there was always virtue in destroying a weed, wherever found. Now, while John was having a sociable beer with Mother, weeds were dying and I wasn't looking.

There was nothing unusual about John's shirking farm work. He didn't like work in the fields, and the family understood that he was born for something better. He should have had that art education in Paris. Since he missed it, Mother was more than ready to condone any little respite from the hot and dirty work of the farm which Poor John might be able to steal for himself.

Blackberries were considered the women's business. In all, there were about four acres planted to berries, a small part of which was devoted to black raspberries. Dad did not know much about the care of berry plants. The four acres became, in the course of years, a veritable jungle of thorny vines, alive and dead. Proper care requires the clearing out of dead vines and some trimming.

Blackberries ripened in the hottest weather. They had to be picked as soon as they turned black, for they perished quickly on the bushes. Mother had apparently infinite capacity for picking blackberries. She put on a tough old woolen skirt that had been through many miles of thorns, and covered her arms with heavily ribbed black cotton stockings, with holes for the fingers in the worn foot of the stocking. She pulled herself through the maze of thorny bushes with skill born of long experience. She was by far the fastest blackberry picker on the farm.

Marie was a constant helper in this torrid labor. Mother did not like to have Marie scratching her hands on the blackberry thorns, since she was a young girl and naturally wanted to look well when she went anywhere, or when anyone called. But Marie would not see Mother taking the burden of all the hard work. She must share it with her.

Margaret joined the pickers when she could, and put in many hours under the blackberry sun. We younger boys didn't like the work a bit, but also contributed to the gathering of berries when we had to.

John sometimes helped in the berry-picking, and generally had the job of taking the crates of berries to town. There was never any trouble about finding a market. There was more of a demand than we could supply. The price ranged from \$2.50 to \$4 a crate, and sometimes went lower than the low figure. A crate consisted of 24 full quarts.

An advantage of the blackberry business was that it used no paid labor, and the unit for selling was compact enough to be carried in the cart, with one horse.

While watermelons, muskmelons, apples, grapes, peaches, and most other perishable products of the farm had to be taken to market in the middle of the night, to compete with other farmers who lined their wagons at the curb in front of the leading grocery stores before daylight every morning, blackberries could be sold at any hour of the day. Few farmers cared to bother with berries, and ours were known as the finest, biggest, and best-selected in the local market.

So John did not have to peddle his wares. He simply drove his cart to the curb at the fruit stand near the corner of Main and Douglas, and the manager himself came out, carried in the crates, and paid cash. John was always meticulously dressed for such work. He wore a well-tailored suit, a \$5 Dunlap derby hat, and a fancy necktie on his clean, well-made shirt-front. He wore driving gloves of pigskin, and when not driving, changed to a dark kid. His shoes were of the soft leather known as vici kid.

Since giving up his art career, John had shown a strong tendency

toward artistic penmanship. He had somehow acquired a fine Spencerian hand. His penmanship surprised the schoolteachers at Riverside, who said that John should go to business college and develop that talent for fine writing.

On rainy days, on Sundays, and whenever he could steal a little time, John practiced his penmanship. He learned to write a tremendous signature, John E. Driscoll, with heavily shaded lettering, and a cocky-looking bird sitting on a sketchy nest, up above the capital D.

John wore gloves at his farm work. He was the only man or boy in the Valley who wore gloves in summer time. Very few used any sort of hand covering, even in winter. If they had to handle frosty things in winter, they sometimes went to the extent of buying wool-lined leather mittens. John wore nice pigskin gloves, even when hoeing watermelons. The neighbors considered this a rather citified affectation, and once in a long time some neighbor, helping out at harvest, would try to make a joke out of John's gloves.

John would not take what the Valley folk called kidding. He would not answer in kind. If the joke cut deeply, he would look the critic squarely in the eye and say, "Fools make fun of wise men because they are fools. A fool laughs at his own folly. You think you are something, whereas you are nothing."

This usually took the wind out of the yokel's sails. The whole countryside learned to do its joking about John's gloves and neckties where he wouldn't hear. The farmers could understand blow for blow, but solemn and lofty language unhorsed them completely.

If Dad had gone to market early in the morning with a load that might take many hours to sell, John usually came in from his field work and either sat on the North Porch, sipping lemonade with Mother, or at the dining-room table, practicing penmanship. He would return to the field when there was danger that the Old Man might come home.

There was the tang of furtive lawlessness about the lemonade and penmanship. Dad might come earlier than expected.

One hot forenoon, we were in the dining room, where overhanging maple boughs protected walls and windows from the

scorching sun. John had come in, propped his hoe against the south side of the house, and sat down to make fancy birds with a shading pen. There was a pitcher of cool lemonade on the side.

I thought I heard the jingle of harness in the driveway. I went to the kitchen, looked through the north window, and shouted, "Here he comes!"

John went through the south window of the dining room in as graceful a leap as I ever saw him make. He grabbed his hoe, and was off on a run through the orchards, dodging behind trees to keep out of view of the enemy.

John was selected for the lead in the outstanding dramatic production of our Valley. He was to play the part of a popular bachelor in the dramatic comedy in three acts, "Mr. Brown." It was the most ambitious dramatic performance ever attempted in the school district, or, indeed, in any community that we had ever heard of.

Elsie Snyder, who was teaching at Riverside School, conceived the idea of this super-entertainment, in which students of the school would form the supporting cast for the star. John had been out of school for two or three years at this time.

Rehearsals were held twice a week through the early part of the winter. These were occasions for social intercourse and romantic contacts. Three marriages resulted. John took his sister Margaret to rehearsals. She had a part in the play.

So that the customers would be sure to get their money's worth, the evening of entertainment was divided into two parts. The play occupied the first half. After an intermission, there was a diversified school entertainment, with recitations, dialogs, drills and singing. Rose Stuckey and I did a dialog in which she had a sick doll and I was the doctor. Mother cut down Dad's stovepipe hat, which he had not worn since the day he bought the half a pound of tea, and made a swallow-tail coat for me.

John, as the eligible Mr. Brown, was the hit of the evening. He had natural dramatic talent. He had dramatized himself so often in the fields, for the horse audience, that he appeared natural and experienced in his first stage appearance.

The U. B. Church had been remodeled within, for this notable occasion. A stage had been built, and kerosene lamps had been placed in a trough across the front of the stage, for footlights. Extra seats were installed. The mourners' bench served as the repository for coats, hats and cloaks. Tickets were printed. The curtain, of magnificent proportions, was made by the willing hands of neighborhood women. It ran on a steel wire, stretched across the proscenium arch.

The house was crowded to capacity. Standees occupied the three aisles, almost up to the edge of the stage.

We were proud of John, especially when he took the center of the stage in the final scene, and, with clenched fists, recited:

I'll go where the tigers and jackals will meet me,  
I'll go where the people will sit down and eat me,  
But never, so long as my name is John Brown,  
Will I be the only young man in the town!

You might think that John would be spoiled by his initial stage success. Not at all. His career was Art in a more artistic sense, and it was behind him. We heard nothing about the sensational dramatic success of our John, except from the neighbors. Nobody ever heard the leading man say that he thought he might make a fair actor. When the matter was mentioned in his presence, John quietly went out to feed the horses or perform some other chores.

He went back to his penmanship. Mother wrestled with the Lord in prayer and coaxed Himself day after day, to get John started to business college. It was little enough as compensation for the Paris art course John had not had.

Tuition for the course at Southwestern Business College was \$50, cash in advance. Not only would it be hard to raise the money, but John's services, such as they were, were needed on the farm. Well, the Old Man supposed he could get a hired man for his board and lodging to help feed the cattle, and John could either ride a horse back and forth to and from school, or, in a case of dire necessity, perhaps we could buy a one-horse cart.

The tuition was paid, and John started riding horseback to school.

Southwestern was a prosperous institution, occupying three floors of a business "block" on North Main street. Its specialty at the moment was business penmanship.

John learned, to his dismay, that his penmanship was all wrong, out of style, useless in the business world. Patiently, he set to work to learn the new business penmanship. He worked at the muscular movement by day and by night.

Old Charlie, the bony plow-horse that was assigned to John for his transportation, slipped on ice, fell with his rider, and John suffered a sprained ankle that kept him confined at home for a week. Big Flurry, noting that it was unreasonable to expect a boy to ride such unsuitable horses in winter weather, went to town and bought for about \$20 a two-wheel one-horse cart. The seat could be lifted forward on hinges to open a box underneath. In this box John carried his books and supplies and the lunch that Mother put up for him each morning. At his feet in the open cart, he carried in a sack the corn that was to be the horse's mid-day meal. Arrangements were made for free stabling in a friend's barn.

As John progressed in his studies and became more and more expert in the new penmanship, Big Flurry found expenses mounting. There was the cost of that cart, and those books, and all that writing paper. Then it occurred to the Old Man that farm horses do not stand up well under a daily driving schedule on the roads. One day, the Old Man came home from a trip to the stockyards, where he had sold hogs, leading behind the wagon a rip-snorting wild Indian pony.

Wild horses and ponies were being rounded up in the Indian Territory and shipped or herded to Wichita for marketing. Dad had taken what he could get as the lasso fell, more or less at random, in a pen containing a herd of a hundred or more of these wild beasts. It was a super-wild bay filly, just about a hundred pounds too heavy to class as a pony under ordinary rules. But the little wild horses were generally known as Indian ponies in our part of the world, even though they were not exactly within the pony classification. They roamed the prairies and the Wichita mountains, in the Indian Territory, in great numbers.



There was widespread belief that the progenitors of these horses were cavalry mounts of the Coronado expedition of 1540-41. In the first generation in captivity, these wild horses seldom became tame. A wild mare, if turned loose in pasture, might produce foal of high spirits but good domestic quality. Ves Booher, our Valley reporter of news and gossip, rode an Indian pony of the second generation, a handsome specimen, fleet as the wind, dangerous to strangers, but gentle as a spaniel with his master.

When Dad paid ten dollars for the wild filly we named Fan, he did not realize that Ves's pony had not been lassoed on the plains, but had been foaled in captivity. The Old Man turned the young hurricane over to John, expecting him to gentle her and make of her, in the course of time, another sleek little ornament, such as was ridden by our Paul Revere, Ves.

John had to quit business college about this time for early spring work on the farm. During the months that intervened between this time and his resumption of school work in the following November, he tried to civilize the wild filly. She had been turned out in the pasture and woods, to associate with farm horses and cattle. She ignored them, fled from them and from all humans, and hid in the deep, dark woods.

The civilizing influence that was most counted upon was thirst. In August, when all pools dried up, she would have to come up to the corral for water. She did, was lassoed and haltered. It took three men to do that job, John swinging the lasso. He had learned to do this trick well, and delighted in it, because it gave play to the skill that resided in his arm, wrist and finger muscles.

Fan was tied to a post near the barnyard, tethered with a stout rope. There she tugged, lunged, kicked and charged with teeth and hooves, at all comers. Feed was tossed at her, and she lived.

John and Dad, working with ropes and binding straps, managed to get a saddle on her by mid-September. But Dad would not attempt to ride her, for he made no claims to horsemanship with wild horses. He suggested beating as the sure cure for all this nonsense. John said that, since he had to drive the mare eventually, he would like to have charge of her breaking, which would include

no beating. Dad agreed. He thought it a fine idea to give this dude son, who was a notoriously bad driver, a problem horse to deal with. Nevertheless, when John was away, Big Flurry contributed his bit to the solution of the Fan problem by giving her a thorough dressing-down with a heavy blacksnake whip.

John did not succeed in riding Fan. He stuck on through a good deal of bucking, but when his mount deliberately lay down and rolled over and over, like a wildly celebrating tumbleweed, John gave up the idea of breaking her to saddle.

By binding her legs with a stout lasso, John managed to get harness on the wild mare. He hitched her to a breaking cart, with a large, slow, and dependable draft horse on each side of her. Fan lay down between the shafts, leaped in the air, bit her team-mates on the withers, and kicked so high that she got her hind legs caught over the singletrees.

In November, John went back to business college, driving Fan to the cart. No stable in town would take her in, so she was tied to a post in a vacant lot, with a warning posted: "Beware Dangerous Horse."

Fan never learned to trot sedately, like other horses. John had to be in the cart, his feet braced, one rein in each hand, before the brute was unloosed from the hitching post in the morning. Away they went in a cloud of dust, the wild mare, belly close to the ground like a hound on the trail of a rabbit, running in long leaps. The stout cart swayed from side to side of the road. Every trip was a runaway.

Twice Fan came home with the cart, minus the driver. Then Dad, on horseback or in the spring wagon, started on the road to town, looking for his eldest son. Both times, John was found plodding homeward afoot, bloody, torn, dishevelled. He had nothing to say except, "She turned the cart over and I fell out."

By the middle of the second January in business college, John decided that this was too strenuous a life for a penman. He took a room, with another business college student, away up under the skylight in the Zimmerly Building. This was a business "block," one of the real skyscrapers, which appeared in full page in all

booster literature of Wichita. It was five stories high, with two elevators, a stone façade, a round turret on one corner, and show windows on Douglas avenue for the clothing store that occupied the ground floor. There were no building code laws to prevent the use of a business building for dwelling purposes, but there was a certain prejudice among professional men and their clients against getting too high up in the air, especially if one had to ride up and down in elevators. Many of the plains folk simply refused to ride in elevators, and if a doctor or lawyer should rent quarters on the fifth floor of this skyscraper, he might find himself with little work to do. So the top floor was turned into a rooming house, chiefly for business college boys.

Dad supplied money for the added expenses, a few dollars at a time. John found much more time for study than he had had when driving back and forth. He made such progress that winter, in penmanship, actual business practice, double-entry bookkeeping and commercial law, that he almost got his diploma. But he had to quit early, to start the spring plowing.

Fan was now turned out in the woods. From time to time during the summer, John caught her with a lasso and drove her to vespers in Wichita, on Sunday evenings. But nobody would ride with him behind this wild animal, and every trip was still a runaway.

That fall, John went back into residence at the Zimmerly Building and set out to finish his education. The only untoward incident of the season was a terrific hailstorm that broke the quarter-inch glass skylight of the sleeping quarters into millions of fragments and caused panic among the roomers.

John's roommate, handsome R. C. Adams, testified that, while others were running for cover and calling the police, John was found on his knees beside his bed, quietly praying. Shattered glass showered down upon him. He was unhurt. He brought home as a souvenir a section of the thick glass which had lodged in his nightshirt pocket. He kept it on his dresser all his life.

That fall the *Penman's Art Journal* offered a grand prize for the best penmanship among business college students in North America. Professor E. H. Robbins, who was John's penmanship instructor,

induced the young man to prepare a sample of his handwriting for the contest, and advised the signature J. E. Driscoll, instead of John E. Better balance and a more business-like effect, said the Professor.

Out of many thousands of contestants in the United States and Canada, our J. E. won first prize easily. He received a cash prize in gold, plus a gold badge. The badge, chosen in preference to a medal, was a neat little scroll, with quill pen engraved on it, together with a record of the award. It occupied a place on the left lapel of J. E.'s vest, throughout his life. When vest lapels went out of style, J. E. had his vests tailored with lapels, just the same.

Toward spring, John brought home his diploma, and he and Mother set out to find a suitable frame for it. The diploma was the largest I have ever seen. At Martin's Art Store a proper frame was designed and built. It was of fumed oak, six inches wide, plain and dignified.

The framed diploma was hung in the dining room, occupying the whole width of the wall section between a door and window, behind Dad's chair at the table. Mother used to like to call attention to the diploma's officially inscribed statement that this diploma was awarded in consideration of the candidate's good character, probity, business ability and studious habits. She said those professors were gentlemen of keen intelligence indeed, and were not slow to recognize merit in a good young man.



*I wanted to be an educated man, perhaps not as learned as John, but as important in another way. I was making good grades in school in everything except arithmetic. I was reading everything that came to hand, and soon found that I knew a number of things that even John didn't know.*

*In the family cleavage that was obviously growing, we were all on Mother's side.*

*I was certain that Big Flurry would be opposed to any extensive form of education for any of us. He seemed to regret that he had given John the business college training, thereby making a derbied dude out of him.*

*John said that the two boys should go to some good Catholic school when they were old enough.*

*"The Christian Brothers would wallop the hell out of them," he said, "and that might do them a lot of good. They seem to have no talent for expertcy in penmanship. The fear of God is the best thing for them. If only we knew where the Christian Brothers have a school, not too far away."*

*Nobody dared broach the subject of educating the boys to Big Flurry.*

*He had troubles enough. He was convinced that we had acquired altogether too much book-learning at the country school. Were we not all too often caught reading when we should be pulling weeds?*

## 13

BIG FLURRY's great weakness in farming was his attitude toward animals. He had little appreciation for blue blood of any sort, in man or beast. Experience taught him that one must get new blood into the hog and cattle pens and that certain types of stallions produced more sturdy colts than others. But he never went so far as to make a year-after-year effort to breed his horses up within a certain strain. Most of his brood mares were of nondescript breeding. Their colts were usually sold as soon as broken, when they were between two and three years old. Some of our finest horses were sold at that age to the Wichita Fire Department, which could afford to pay high prices. We got as much as \$150 each for some of the best and most high-spirited of our colts.

When we were in town during a fire department run, it was thrilling to see the smoking engine reel around the corner with three of our horses in brass-bound harness, dashing along at breakneck speed, saving a city from flames. As a small boy, I used to wonder why we couldn't keep some of the fire department stock for ourselves. I pictured John, on the seat of a wheat binder, driving a six-horse gray team at the gallop, harvesting the crop in time to save it from threatened rain.

When we sold to the Fire Department, the buyer usually came out to the farm, picked his colt, and made the deal, subject only to the condition that the colt must be broken to harness and not worked in the fields. He didn't want a subdued horse; merely one that could be handled.

Big Flurry was careful in the breaking of these colts. John went along and helped harness and hitch the young animal with a

sensible old horse as team-mate. On a rainy day, when no field work could be done, the colt might be driven a mile or two, taught to obey the reins. There was little or no beating of Fire Department colts. Himself was not going to have to handle them after breaking, so he didn't care to take the trouble to beat them into submission.

A horse destined for use on the farm was quickly subdued by Big Flurry. Take the case of Perry. He was a spirited bay gelding nearly three years old when broken. He was named for the hero of Lake Erie, because the family was soaked in the tradition of the Lake, and believed Commodore Perry to be the greatest of all Americans. Didn't his brother civilize Japan? Well, we had heard that story, anyway. There was a long piece about Perry and his Japanese mission, with glorious woodcuts, in our chief household book, "Great Events of Our Past Century."

Perry was hitched with an older horse to a farm wagon, after having once become accustomed to being led about with harness on. Taking a hired man along, Big Flurry drove the team to town. The colt proved to be a bit flighty. He shied and snorted and misbehaved more than most of Dad's colts did in the breaking, and the Old Man several times gave him a few cuts of the blacksnake on the way to town. This seemed to make the colt wilder than ever, instead of taming him.

The hired man counseled a little more gentleness, and suggested that a spirited colt should be given time to learn the ways of harness work. Big Flurry gave the hired man one scornful glance and said, "Jarge, you stand by for ordhers, and belay the gab. When you're needed on deck, you'll hear the pipe."

George was piped to station on Douglas avenue, when the watchman at the Santa Fe grade crossing lowered the gates by use of a hand crank, and stepped out in the street with a red flag in his hand. The patriotic Perry reared at sight of the red flag, and went wild when a big locomotive drawing a passenger train, started across the street, chugging hot steam into the highway and ringing a bell, only a few feet from Perry's rural nose.

Perry lunged toward the slowly moving locomotive, crashed himself and his team-mate through the lowered gate, narrowly



missed taking the watchman's head off with his left front hoof, and seemed about to take the locomotive by storm.

"All hands to stations!" cried Big Flurry. Handing the heavy driving lines to George, he shouted, "Take the helm, Jarge! Keep her head into the wind! 'Tis heavy weather abeam, I'm thinking!"

Over the side he went, a spare oak neckyoke in his right hand. He had brought along several spare parts and a few scantlings, for emergencies.

Gripping the heavy, iron-fitted neckyoke with both hands and wielding it as a ballplayer handles a bat, he landed a telling blow on Perry's left jaw, a second on the top of his head, and a third on his nose. The horse went to his knees, within two feet of the engine's wheels, just as the engineer, fearing a fatal mishap, stopped the locomotive dead in its tracks and shut off the exhaust steam.

The big Irishman dropped his neckyoke on the first railroad track and caught the horse's bridle rein, jerking Perry to his feet.

The engineer was down on the ground now, but seemed helpless enough.

"Look here, Mister, you can't beat the fear out of that horse's head!" he shouted.

Dad held the horse, now snorting and reeling, by one hand, while he sized up the intruder.

"Have you got a job on that engine there, I don't know?" he asked, with elaborate politeness.

"Yes, I'm the engineer—this is my engine."

"You'm best be getting on with it, so, before I wring your God-damned neck! If me harse farted steam, like your engine, I wouldn't be sticking me God-damned nose into other people's business, at all, at all! Get on with it now, before I lame you with this neckyoke!"

As Big Flurry reached for his weapon, the engineer climbed back into his cab, and almost noiselessly pulled his train over the crossing.

Three times the bay colt was down on the railroad tracks, his infuriated master on top of him, beating, kicking, cursing. A fat-bellied old policeman stood by, attracted by the crowd that was

forming. Several times the officer of the law started to say something to the berserk farmer. Big Flurry reached out his left hand and pushed him away with a shove in the chest.

"Take care of yourself now, Bluecoat!" he shouted. "'Tis not collecting fines from fancy women you are now at all! Out of me way!"

Perry came home, a changed animal. His head was down. He was lame in three legs. His nose apparently was fractured. He kept shaking his head. In his eyes was a wild gleam of suffering and bewilderment.

Perry lived to a ripe old age. But he was a comic-strip horse. Everybody said he was crazy, and probably he was. Visiting farmers said he was locoed, but we knew better. The loco weed, in more recent years known to the F.B.I. as marihuana, grew in pastures. Horses that ate of it went crazy. They acted as Perry did. But Perry's insanity was not of the weed.

Perry was perpetually thin. Though he worked daily in harness, on the cultivator, plow, wagon, hay-rake, he remained a problem. He tried to pull all the load, as if attempting to forestall any beating he might get for lagging. He fought against bridling and harnessing, every day. When he was at large for the week-end, he attempted to preserve his liberty by running madly from anyone who set out to catch him. I suppose he was an escapist.

Once I witnessed a major battle between Big Flurry and Perry. I had carried a bottle of water to Dad in the field, where he was cultivating potatoes with Perry, hitched to a double-shovel. This was the kind of work that called for a patient, plodding horse that could be trusted to walk midway between the rows at a steady, slow pace.

Perry started out to make a speed record, and pulled his master along at a break-neck pace. The more the Old Man shouted at him, the faster Perry went.

When I reached the headland, the two of them were at it, hammer and tongs. They were rolling in the freshly turned earth, over the potato vines, between the rows, everywhere. Sometimes Dad was on

top, one hand on Perry's throat, the other wielding an oak single-tree on Perry's head. Sometimes Perry was on top, kicking, striking with his forelegs, trying to roll on the Old Man and crush him. It was easy to see that Big Flurry was going to fire the last shot in this battle, but I did think I'd have to call for reinforcements for him.

I sidled up as close to the battle as seemed safe. The Old Man rose to his feet. Perry presently did the same. Dad, holding to Perry's checkrein, took the beer-bottle of cold water from me, wiped his face with his dirty shirtsleeve, and took a long drink.

"Ah, 'tis a fine dhrink, and I was dhry!" he said. He handed the bottle back to me with a hearty "God spare you, child!"

Then he resumed beating Perry.

Roan was so thin that we boys called her Bones, and she answered to that name as well as to any. She had been roan as a colt, but she became a freckled, mousy gray as she grew older. She was the dam of some of our best Fire Department colts. I think her only happy hours were spent with her young colts, teaching the awkward things to walk, to eat grass, to behave like horses. She was a good brood mare, but a dumb brute in harness.

Roan and Perry had one trick in common. Both fought against taking a bit into their mouths. A grown man could force them simply by applying hand pressure to the gums, back of the teeth, on the lower jaw. But a youngster was at a disadvantage. Roan would hold her head as high in the air as the halter rope would permit, and then hold her jaws tightly together.

My worst bouts with these stubborn horses happened at about one o'clock in the morning, when no help was to be had. A coal-oil lantern hung on a nail in a scantling on the east side of the stable. I would be feeding and harnessing a team, in preparation for a trip to market with a load of apples, peaches, watermelons, muskmelons, or perhaps a mixed cargo. It was necessary to get up at about one o'clock, so as to get rolling by a little before two. No pace faster than a slow walk could be expected of the hard-working team. You were lucky if you pulled up at the curb in front of Charlie Fuller's grocery store by four o'clock. By that time there would be fifty or

sixty other wagons, loaded with the same kind of produce you had to sell, waiting for Fuller and other buyers to pass along and buy or reject.

I started taking loads of apples to market when I was not more than twelve years old. I could throw the harness on the horses easily enough, and did not have too much trouble fastening the collar on Perry, although he reared, struck his head against the stable beams, and snorted mightily. I climbed up on the edge of the manger, beat him on the head with my fists, and clung with both arms around his neck, fastening the collar at the top, while Perry fought me.

Getting bits into the mouths of the stubborn Roan and Perry sometimes proved almost too much for me. If I could catch them while they were munching their early morning corn, I would pull the halter rope down and tie the heads close to the manger. Then I had my horse at a disadvantage when bridling time came. I could reach to the top of the brute's head with the headpiece of the bridle with one hand, and rain blows with the other fist on the stubborn mouth. Or, I could use both hands on the bit, sawing back and forth on the tightly closed front teeth, until the animal would surrender from toothache.

I often tried pinching the lower jaw, as I had seen the men doing. But my hands were not strong enough to impress the stubborn beasts. My grip was not strong. So weak was it, in fact, that I never milked a cow without excruciating pain in both hands, caused by the constantly repeated gripping movement. I never developed a strong hand-grip.

If I neglected to seize the opportunity to tie the horse's head down during feeding, I had an almost impossible task on my hands. Both Roan and Perry learned to rear back on the halter rope, head elevated to the limit, and stay that way. The more you beat them, the more tightly they pulled up and back on the rope. I climbed up on the manger, bridle in hand, often crying with exasperation and a sense of frustration. The horse lay back on his haunches, and I could scarcely reach his mouth. I kicked him in the teeth, beat my fists against his jaws until they were skinned and bleeding. It

was not uncommon for this battle to go on until the east was growing light. Then, thoroughly exhausted, I would start my day's selling trip, full of rage against my unspeakable horses.

I never saw Dad having any serious trouble about bridling one of these recalcitrant horses.

"Here, God damn you, Perry!" he would say, and Perry would open his mouth for the bit like a circus steed. He had had his jaws yanked apart so often by the strong hands of the gigantic Boss that he was not going to ask for trouble any more. But the two rebels took it out on me, knowing that I didn't have the strength to force them.

So I was not as sorry for Roan as I might have been, on the occasion of the husking. This incident, shocking in its revelation of cruelty, was known among us as the husking of Old Bones. Although Roan was not more than seven years old at the time, she was called Old Bones by most of the family.

I was driving the team in the cornfield while Big Flurry husked corn for feeding the hogs that day. It was a Sunday. Later in the season, we would not go out after the day's feed on a Sunday afternoon, but early in fall, before serious cornhusking began, it sometimes was necessary to provide the hog feed on a hand-to-mouth basis. The job would take about an hour under ordinary circumstances.

Old Bones was always hungry. She had the misfortune to be on the left, from which side Dad was throwing the ears into the wagon as he husked. She kept eating all along the way, and fudging over to the left to find more luscious ears.

Big Flurry had had two big pitchers of his last season's wine that day, plus a few swigs at the jug of rye. He was angry with the family for some obscure reason. That was a bad day for Roan's foraging.

The stupid, greedy mare never obeyed commands.

"Gee, God damn your soul, gee!" the irate Boss shouted, again and again, while I pulled on the right line to get her over where she belonged.

The angry husker didn't seem to blame me for the mare's

misbehavior, as he usually did. He saw that I was pulling, and only occasionally looked up at me and shouted, "Starboard the helm!" or "You'll be on the rocks me bye, unless you can keep that helm hard over to starboard!"

I could see that the Old Man was in no mood for nonsense, and I was frightened. But I did my best. I was assisted by occasional flying assaults by the Boss. He would land at the mare's head, both fists pounding. He would kick her in the belly, again and again, until she would grunt heavily and try to fall down.

Finally, the Old Man's patience was exhausted. The combined fragrances of rye and wine were setting things whirling in his head, I have no doubt. He started jabbing Roan in the belly with the husking pin. For non-agricultural readers permit me to explain that a husking pin is a sort of metal hook, fastened to the right hand of the husker with a leather harness, so that it forms a sixth finger, between the thumb and forefinger. The husker becomes skilled in operating this extra finger in separating the ear of corn from its heavy coating of husks. The point of the pin is not as sharp as a knife point, but it is a wicked thing with which to strike a blow.

"Starboard, you gray devil!" shouted Big Flurry, and he jabbed the cruel pin into the mare's hide. "If you can't learn gee and haw, I'll learn you port and starboard!"

He found the husking pin a fascinating instrument of punishment. Every time he jabbed it into the mare's hide, she reared, plunged, showed signs of life. She was such a dull creature, seldom raising her head above the feed-box level, that this seemed a wondrous tonic. The Old Man kept jabbing, cursing, and shouting, "Starboard, me lass! It's not mess time all day! I'll stop your soldiering! Starboard! Blast your crooked timbers, starboard!"

I was holding the lines, but had little control. Big Flurry was in charge. He had a way of reaching up with one hand and catching the reins when the team started off in another direction. He just kept on punching, each punch bringing blood. How long this painful action continued, I could not say. It seemed a half hour. When it was over, an irregular area of the gray hide, as big as a

man's broad-brimmed hat, was covered with blood and ugly wounds.

Then we went on with gathering corn for the hogs. Roan lived many years after that, dying at the age of twenty from an infection on her head, caused by John's good aim when he threw a beer bottle at her. Through life she carried an odd-looking patch, the size of a man's hat, on her left underside. It was plowed up in ridges and mounds, curiously.

As for Fan, the wild Indian pony that Dad bought for John, the Old Man drove her on only two occasions, to the cart. She ran away from him both times. No man and no bit could hold her. From one of the runaways, Big Flurry came plodding home afoot, with a sprained knee. Fan had preceded him by an hour, with a partly wrecked cart behind her. She was tied to a tree when the Old Man came into the yard. Without so much as a glance at the anxious family that awaited him, the Boss went to a pile of lumber and sought out a good length of two-by-four oak. Not until he had broken this handy weapon into splinters did he seek arnica for his knee.

After a few years of wild life on our farm, Fan refused to come to the corral, even for water. To catch her for a trip to town, you had to chase her on horseback, with lasso. She usually could escape into the underbrush and avoid the harness.

During one very dry summer, we missed Fan when the other animals, no matter how wild, came in the evening for water at the tank in the corral. During that fall, Van and I found her skeleton, picked clean by the buzzards. It was standing upright in the round pond called the Buffalo Wallow. In dry weather, this was just a muddy puddle. Fan had gone to the very center of the drying pool to quaff a drink of its dirty water, and had become helplessly stuck in the quicksand under the mud surface of the bottom of the wallow. There she had starved to death, or been torn to small bits, while still living, by the cunning birds that watch for death in the wild and cruel places of the world.

Our horses were a various lot, of many strains and breeds. In general, they lacked the spirit and style of the horses of the most successful farmers in the Valley. We had no well-matched teams,

and our horses did not hold their heads erect, as well-bred, well-fed and well-treated horses do. We never had a driving horse until Margaret became a schoolteacher and bought one for herself with her own money.

Prince was a sorrel draft horse of considerable intelligence and cunning. He didn't like Big Flurry, nourished a grudge against him, but had sense enough to pull his share of the load all the time.

Prince liked to play tricks on the Old Man. When led to the trough on a hot day, he would dawdle at his drinking, in order to kill time. He would have his muzzle in the trough, sucking in water and letting it flow back again through the sides of his mouth. He knew that farm ethics require that you permit a horse to stand at the trough as long as he wants to keep his nose in the water. It is presumed that he is thirsty for that length of time, and any work horse is worthy of his drinking water.

Big Flurry sometimes became impatient with Prince's drinking, as, I have no doubt, Prince also had occasion to become impatient of his master's drinking.

"Prince, God damn you, dhrink now, and don't that you do be standing there sthraining the water through your teeth!" cried the Old Man. If Prince didn't mind, he was likely to be jerked away from the trough, despite ethics.

Prince was one of a team hitched to the carriage, after we acquired that luxury, and tied in the east yard, while the family was preparing to go to Mass on a Sunday morning. The horses were not shod, and had been on the road lately, so their hooves were split and ragged. Dad always claimed that John would let the horses' hooves fall off or go to ruin rather than trim them. So, partly as an occasion for a lecture on shiftless animal husbandry, Dad, who was not going to church, got out mallet and chisel and started trimming the hooves.

Prince, hearing the loud lecture, knew that the Old Man was in a querulous humor. When the operator started on Prince's right hind hoof, the sorrel turned his head, watched carefully, and, at just the right moment, quickly lifted the foot so that the front of it struck the Old Man's nose.



Lecture and operation ceased suddenly. Bawling like a gigantic baby, blood spurting from both nostrils, the lecturer staggered to the pump and began dousing his head in a tub of cold water. His clothes were covered with blood, and he was a sorry sight.

I had witnessed the incident, and hastened to tell the family that I thought Dad was badly hurt. The whole neighborhood could hear his loud bellowing. Mother said he was just looking for sympathy, and told me to pay no attention to him.

With cattle, the Old Man had not a much more skilled hand than with horses. He started his herd with scrubs, and scrubby it remained as it grew in size. He would buy a bull every three or four years, but never were two successive bulls of the same breed, and never was any of them notable for good breeding. Sometimes the Boss would let a good-looking bull-calf grow up to be head of the herd, disregarding ties of consanguinity and laws of heredity.

When he was feeding steers for the market, the Boss sometimes got pointers on feeding from Henry Schweiter, most successful feeder in our part of the world. He turned out some creditable herds of fat cattle, and got good prices for them at the Wichita stockyards.

Our so-called milch cows were the most deplorable milk-withholding animals I have ever heard of. They numbered from two to a dozen in different years and seasons. No two were alike, except that nearly all were wild, stubborn, long, bony, long-legged, and speedy. They were really racing cattle without any track, rather than milkers.

When one of these cows had a calf, Big Flurry decided whether she was to raise the calf, running wild in the woods, or whether she was to become a milk-producer for the household. Mother was always anxious to have more cows milking. The more cows, presumably, the more milk, the more butter, and the more work for Mother and the girls. Mother loved making, molding and selling butter. It entailed work and more work, but we had no illusions about easy money at our house. Pound prints of nice, yellow butter, wrapped in a damp napkin on the journey to town on warm days, brought from ten to twenty cents a pound, and that was money not to be lightly considered.

The women of our family never milked cows. On most neighboring farms, this was a woman's work. Big Flurry did not have a high opinion of men who had their women out in the pens and sheds, in all kinds of weather, milking cows. Blackberry picking, yes. There was no manure connected with that job. The handling of animals that produced such quantities of offal was a man's job, in the Irishman's opinion and practice.

The women took charge of the milk when it was delivered in the kitchen, in pails. It was usually strained into earthenware crocks holding one gallon each. These crocks were glazed brown outside and inside, often with a bit of the stone color showing around the top rim and on the bottom. Mother bought them by the dozen at a queen's ware store on North Main street.

The crocks were placed on the but'ry shelves in winter, and in the milk trough down cellar in summer. They were left undisturbed until the wide top surface was covered with thick cream, a day or two following the milking.

Mother or one of the daughters skimmed the cream off into a container, or into the churn. The process was simple. The crock was tipped to one side and the cream started with a couple of dainty swishes with the forefinger. The cream, accompanied by a minimum of the top milk below it, easily flowed into the churn. Every crock that was ripe for skimming went through the same process.

The sour milk, under the cream, was dumped into the swill barrel near the back porch, and eventually went to the hogs, carried the half block distance to the pens in buckets by the men.

Churning occurred every day in spring, when grass was lush and cows were regularly on hand for milking. Our churn was of wooden staves, bound around with iron hoops. It was only as big around as a dinner plate at the top, twice that big around at the bottom, and was tall enough to reach up to the waist, or thereabout.

Everybody took a turn at working the churn dash up and down. A broomhandle with a circular piece of wood on one end was the dash. The plate of wood was just big enough to fit inside the churn at the top, and had one row of holes, as big as a quarter,

close to its outer edge. Pumping this up and down in the cream and sour milk brought the butter to the surface. There was a hole in the center of the wooden churn cover, just large enough to permit the dash to work easily. As years went by and the dash made millions of trips up and down, the hole in the cover became larger and the diameter of the handle smaller. The cats happily gobbled up the buttermilk that was splashed over the kitchen floor and outside the churn on account of this free play.

As the churning job was nearing the finish, the churner took the boiling water kettle from the stove and poured from it on the churn dash about a pint of water. Now the butter was carefully gathered from the top of the buttermilk, placed in a crock, drained, kneaded gently with the bare hands until much of the milk and water was out of it. Then it was slapped into the mold.

We had only one butter mold during my life on the farm. It was carved out of maple wood and made a print of exactly one pound of butter. The mold looked roughly like a bell. The handle went through the top of the bell and its inner part was a circular piece of wood that exactly filled the interior top of the bell. You pulled the handle out as far as it would go, and, holding the upended bell in your left hand, slapped handfuls of butter into the bell. You took care to see that each handful was solidly mixed with the last, and that there were no airholes to cheat the customers. When the bell was filled exactly level full, and all was solid, you carefully turned the bell right side up, set it on a board covered by clean greased paper, pressed down gently with the handle, and thus removed the mold. You had a pound print of golden yellow butter there, with a beautiful design of a rose on its top. The circular piece of wood on the inside end of the plunger was carved so as to make the rose print.

As long as I can remember, the bell part of our butter mold was cracked, much as is the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. Mother never felt that she should throw it away for so slight a fault. The crack showed up as a ridge on the side of the round butter print, giving the customers a little more butter than they were entitled to.

With a great wooden spoon called a butter ladle, Mother smoothed off the sides of the print, giving the customer the extra butter without the unsightly evidence of the crack in the mold.

Mother took pride in her butter. It was highly esteemed by big-bugs who were customers of the exclusive fancy grocery stores where our butter was sold. Naturally, the quantity available for the market varied with the seasons, and in late summer disappeared altogether. There were certain private customers, mostly families characterized by Dad as *grandees*, that received butter even when we had not quite enough to go around at home. They paid three or four cents per pound above the market, and were grateful for the privilege of buying.

Butter money was Mother's money. Big Flurry never thought of inquiring how much it amounted to, what was done with it, or anything about the making or marketing. He simply blotted out all consideration of butter and blackberries. He was satisfied that these items, with eggs and chickens, seemed to run the machinery of the household, and that he had few household bills to pay, in a prosperous season, beyond doctor and grocery bills.

John, Dad and the hired men did the milking before Van and I became old enough to milk cows. Smart hired men always claimed that they didn't know how to milk a cow, but a milking hired man was always more sure of his job. As time went on, Big Flurry did less and less milking, John did more, the hired men did more, and, eventually, Van and I took over. During my latter days on the farm, I did all the milking. I didn't like it, and it helped mightily to drive me to the city.

I learned to milk a cow when I was six years old, milking a small pitcherful and running to the house with it. I was credited with being extraordinarily cute because I rushed into the house with my pitcher of warm milk, stuck my dirty right hand down into the milk, and, indicating an imaginary line within about two inches of the bottom of the pitcher, announced, "Now, each apiece of you can have up to here of it." That was some sort of measure of glory, I suppose.

When Big Flurry divided the waters from the earth, he did it in

this wise. He gave the livestock the water, mud, sandhills, woods, puddles and sandy stretches not considered tillable. The rest of the farm was devoted to cultivation in greater or less degree.

The house was set upon the highest spot on the farm, which was a wise and practical procedure. All of the important outbuildings were on the same hill, within a reasonable distance from the house. Just beyond the stable, the land sloped sharply away to a much lower level, which extended all the way to the river, at least three-quarters of a mile. This low land was broken only by sandhills in the woods.

There was a swale, lower than the rest of the low land, running from the north border of our farm, southward and southeastward half a mile, and this was lowest just east of the stable. This handsome mud puddle Big Flurry fenced off for cattle and horse corrals, feeding pens and hog pastures. The fence for the cow corral ran around the crest of the hill in a quadrant of a circle.

During heavy rains, and for many days after, the cows in the corral stood in muddy water up to their bellies, at least. Otherwise, they stood on the slippery steep slope of the hillside. For sleeping, they found space on the hillside. For cud-chewing, mutual conversation about the weather and the Boss, and especially at milking time, they stood in the center of the acre-wide mud puddle.

Rains were mostly in the spring. At that season, the cattle had all the green grass they wanted for grazing, in the pasture in and near the woods. They were good-humored, and didn't mind being herded up to the corral, through a lane that spanned the quarter mile between corral and pasture. Unless they came up of their own accord for water, Van and I went barefoot to the woods, rounded them up, and drove them to the corral.

Milking during the rainy season wasn't as easy or nice a job as you might suspect. Our cows never wanted to be milked. They looked upon the operation as an indelicate intrusion, and felt justified in taking such measures, short of war, as a scheming cow might devise. Strangely enough, these measures nearly always led to war.

Come milking time, the milch cows were out in the middle of the mud puddle, milking arrangements completely submerged in

water. Just after a rain, this water might not be bad. It was merely muddy. Cow manure made up half the mud content of the water. As summer days passed, a green scum gathered upon the puddle, which began to smell less and less delightful.

An early reform movement on our farm contemplated the filling in of the corral as we had seen city lots filled in, with trash. Van and I had carried to the center of the low land sled-loads of broken glass, tin cans, brush and barrel hoops. This fill-in enterprise came to plague us when we wanted to drive the cows out of the puddle for milking. In our bare feet we dared not venture out into the center of the muddy pool, because we would get our feet cut up. In fact, we did it a few times, and nursed swollen, infected feet for weeks afterward.

We therefore stood on the banks and threw clods at the cows. If the weather were very wet, there were no hard clods. We had no rocks to spare. But we threw what we could find, such as old fence posts, sticks, bones and pieces of iron. When the sun had been out a few days, we had clods as big as we could handle. With these, we often disturbed the cud-chewing equanimity affected by the most nervous of the cows, and drove them to higher land. However, they always chose the lower part of the high land, on the other or eastern shore. We had to climb along the north fence to that side to get our cow for milking. When we got there, she was back in the middle of the puddle. It was quite complicated.

Our problem was largely solved as a result of a city improvement movement in Wichita. The town, which had had a population of less than 5,000 when Big Flurry had first seen it, had reached 16,000 in the year of my birth, and now, eight or ten years later, was claiming something like 25,000. It determined to be a big city, and set out to pave three blocks of Douglas avenue.

Paving the wide avenue meant discarding of the stout wooden sidewalks along this stretch. These were twelve feet wide, of inch-and-a-half oak planking resting on two-by-twelve oak timbers, which, in turn, rested their lower edges upon hard ground, intermixed with cinders.

Dad's uncontrollable tendency to pick up junk, waste and salvage,

led him to buy wagonloads of the discarded sidewalks. They came in stout sections that required two or three men for handling. I don't believe the Old Man had any very definite ideas about what he was going to do with the sidewalk sections. He saw that they were bargains, and he would find a use for them.

Some of the sections were up-ended as walls for pens for farrowing sows. Some were knocked apart to provide timbers for gates and fences. Six or eight of the sections were strewn in a line across the mud puddle, when water was low.

We boys bound the sections together with baling wire, and drove stakes into the water, upstream and downstream, with wire for anchor chains. We always had plenty of used baling wire on the farm. It could be had free at any livery stable, and Dad had brought home wagonloads of it. By untwisting the knotty masses of it, you could get enough wire to hold up a suspension bridge.

Now, when high water came in the corral, we had a bridge across the puddle. The heavy sections floated a little under the surface of the water most of the time. It was great fun, for we could dash to the middle of the pond on the swaying and dipping sections, getting closer by far to our victims than ever before. We could pound them with clods at close range. I trained Mack, Shep and Sport to run out on the bridge, jump off it, swim after the brutes, and chase them ashore.

The dogs loved to swim around the recalcitrant cows, bite their noses, pull their tails, and so annoy them with barking in their ears that the cows were happy to surrender for milking. To keep them from dashing back into the water during milking, it was usually essential to tie them to fence posts at the top of the hill. Thus the cow's head and front feet would be away up; her hindquarters far down on the steep and slippery slope. The milker, on a precarious one-legged stool, sat at his duty, his bucket gripped firmly between his bare feet, and milked.

One advantage of this position in milking in wet weather was that the cow seldom felt secure enough on her feet to kick at the milker or milk bucket. Once in a while, however, she could not resist the temptation, when she observed her milker in a particularly un-

guarded moment, when he might be thinking of Treasure Island and how to get there.

One well-placed kick, sprung as a surprise tactic, might cause much trouble in a case of this kind. Old Red landed one on me on a slippery day. I was wearing a new pair of bib overalls, the first I had ever owned. As Red shot the hoof right, forward, and sharply back, as only a mean cow knows how to do, her left hind foot slipped in the mud, and she fell on me and the milk pail. Her right hoof, however, had caught in the bib of my new overalls, and the back slash of it had torn the garment almost completely off me. When I got up, my belly was bleeding from a deep scratch from the hoof, my clothes were utterly ruined, I was covered with mud and cow manure from crown to foot, and my milk bucket was crushed beyond recognition.

After that, I usually tied the two hind legs together with a rope before starting to milk a vicious cow. Then, by tying the head close to a post, you were safe from both kicking and hooking. Most of our cows had wicked horns, and didn't hesitate to use them when they were bored with milking.

Each cow gave only a small contribution of milk, in comparison with real milch cows. Often the trouble of chasing the cows to the corral, bludgeoning them out of the puddle, and milking them, yielded only a pint or less from some cows, and rarely as much as a gallon, even from a fairly quiet cow that had recently "come fresh." At the height of our dairying industry, I got two level-full buckets of milk, night and morning, from ten to twelve cows. Even Mr. Borden couldn't pay expenses with that kind of yield.

In all honesty, I must admit that the milk from which our delicious butter was made was not clean or sanitary, according to the most lax of city standards of today. We never kept our cows under roof. Well, in special cases, of which I shall relate an instance presently, a cow might be under more or less of a roof for a short time. But, for nine thousand and ninety-nine gallons out of ten thousand, the only shelter the cow had known in her entire life was a straw-covered shed, open on three sides, which served as protection from the north wind in mid-winter, if the wheat crop hap-



pened to be good. More often, the typical Driscoll cow did not know artificial shelter from birth to death.

When I have seen white-coated attendants washing and drying the dairy cows in modern dairies, and the prophylactic machines buzzing and working, I have not been able to forget that six out of eight children grew to adulthood on our farm, and that my grandfather in Ireland, where the milk was produced in far less sanitary conditions, lived to be 104. Not many of the formula babies in New York apartments achieve so many years.

If you had suggested that somebody ought to wash the manure off a cow before milking her, in our time and place, you would have been considered either plain crazy or a sissy. And we had no room, in all the wide acres, for a sissy. A crazy man? Well, that was something else. One did not condemn a man for being crazy, but one did not take his advice too seriously.

If the cow had been out in the pond, her udders dripped pond water into the milk bucket, as a matter of course. Law of gravity or something. One did not attempt to fly in the face of Providence, to correct the laws of God.

If it was raining while one milked the cow, much entertainment might be had. A steady trickle of rainwater came down the cow's flank and into the milk bucket. It was a rich, golden brown, dyed so by the manure that always clung to the cow's back, legs, hips. Cows are dirty animals when given half a chance to be dirty. In the corral, they seemed rather to prefer sleeping in three or four piles of fresh manure than elsewhere. It was, admittedly, a little warmer that way.

As the brown stream flowed into the milk bucket, you kept two white streams going, breaking up the brown pattern on the surface of your milk pond in the bucket. It was fun—and one needed fun in a cold autumn rain, barefooted, without a coat, squatting in the mud and manure, milking the cow—to try to make the white overcome the brown. The result, if all went well, was neither white nor brown, but a rich cream color, when the bucket of milk was turned in at the kitchen. If you were wearing a hat, so much the better. The rain water from the soaking hat went around the brim

and poured out in front, exactly where it was needed in order to supply another important element to the morning's milk.

A nervous cow would sometimes put her foot into the milk bucket without stepping down hard or kicking viciously. Perhaps the flies were bothering her, and she made an error in putting her foot into the bucket. In such a case, you worked gently to get the foot out without spilling the milk or smashing the bucket. Sometimes—generally, in fact—you succeeded. A good deal of manure and dirt would settle in the bucket, but that was no reason for throwing the milk away. You reached down with your hand and clawed the big dirt out. The rest would be taken out by the strainer in the kitchen.

A popular form of milk bucket was of tin, holding about a gallon and a half, with a tin hood or cowl extending over part of one side of the wide opening. In the middle of the tin hood was a copper wire strainer, half again as big around as a silver dollar. In theory, you could pour the milk out and strain it at the same time.

In actual practice, the strainer in the milk bucket usually turned out to be of inferior quality, perhaps cheap iron wire, painted a bright brass color. As soon as the paint wore off and was strained into the milk, the screen started to rust, and then you had breaks in the screen—well, it was cheaper to pour it all through the regular strainer, a tin pan with a screened opening in the bottom, which cost not more than fifteen cents.

All dishes and tools coming in contact with milk in the house were kept scrupulously clean. Churn, dash, ladle, mold and butter bowl were scalded as soon as the butter making was completed. Crocks, jars, pails and covers were boiled or washed in boiling water. Cloths used to wrap around the butter were freshly washed. But I am afraid the production line, before it reached the house, was not so very sanitary.

Most cows, I believe, are provided with four tits, from which milk is drawn. Because there seems to be something shameful to many polite folk about the natural business of nourishing the young mammal, a tit is usually spelled teat, but I never had heard anybody

pronounce it teet, which is the required dictionary pronunciation for that word. However, the same dictionary (Webster's International) gives us tit, so spelled and so pronounced. Well, that was what our cows had, and the cows of our most religious neighbors had the same things. The tits extended downward from the udders, called bags by the owners of these cows.

I bring this matter up only because we boys, in common with all farmers of our time and place, had much to do with the tits of cows, and never, until I went to New York to live, did I learn that there was anything impolite in mentioning the fact in any company.

Our cows were not standardized. Some had three tits. Most had four. Some had five. The fifth tit was somewhat smaller than the other four, in most cases. There was something a little off-side, unstandardized, off-brand, about it. In the coldest winter weather, a cow's tits sometimes were frozen. In the case of the wild cow with crooked horns and a bad disposition, that fifth tit would be frozen, and complications might develop. Whether from freezing or from some other cause, the tit became caked, and the cow was jumpy when you milked it.

Dad decided to break in Old Spot for milking. Spot was a wild, rangy, long-horned beast, red, with a fantastic spotty pattern in white. She had been running wild for years, dropping her calves in the sandhills and protecting them from the coyotes with a fair degree of efficiency. Why Dad decided to convert her into a milker, I could never guess.

Old Spot was lassoed, her calf separated from her, and she was dragged by the horns to a shed between the corncrib and stable. There, after the customary two days and nights of continuous bawling for the offspring, Spot settled down to nibbling at the hay and bran that were offered her at regular intervals. Dad warned all of us to keep away from Spot, as there was no telling what she might do to a minor or a woman. He milked her twice a day, while the old girl was busy with her bran mash.

By the third day, the Old Man thought his experiment in taming the wild cow was showing signs of success. True, she didn't give

very much milk, but neither had she kicked very much. The animal-tamer decided to leave off the hobbles he had been using to protect himself while milking.

By an unfortunate coincidence, I chose that evening milking hour to inflict punishment on Sammie, a mother cat who had deserted her kittens. Van and I had seen Sammie bite her kittens and chase them away when they had attempted to nourish themselves in the natural manner. Probably the poor cat was suffering from some soreness or ailment that we knew nothing of. Anyway, her kittens starved to death, and we boys decided that Sammie should be punished.

Our dogs got along well with the cats, but they thought it a jolly idea to chase a cat if one of their masters suggested it. I saw Sammie walking near our back porch and called to Mack, the short-haired yellow mutt, "Sic 'er, Mack!"

Mack was off on the chase. Sammie, tail in air, made remarkable speed toward the corncrib. She managed to dash under the building just ahead of her pursuer, and undoubtedly thought she would be safe there, as she would have been from one of the larger dogs. Mack was small enough to get through the space under the floor of the corncrib. He carried the war right into his enemy's harbor of safety.

Poor Sammie had to continue her flight. Straight ahead she went, inches in advance of her pursuer, and out the other side of the corncrib. Leaping blindly as she emerged, she landed in Dad's milk bucket, Mack on top of her.

In a flash, cow, dog, cat and Big Flurry were mixed up in a howling, yowling, roaring mass. Sammie, clawing at Mack, tore a great slice out of Spot's udder. Mack tore with his teeth, part of the time at Sammie and again and again at Spot.

Dad was taken so completely by surprise that he was unable to get up steam in time to strike at his wild enemies while the battle raged hottest. All was lost save life, anyway. While the wild cow was doing a series of leaps that broke her halter rope, the Old Man climbed out of the stall, leaving the battered tin pail behind.

Spot turned short and charged, head down, at her tormentors. Cat

and dog were off to safety. Sammie ran up a pole to the top of the shed. Mack raced for the back porch.

Spot went loping across the fields, bellowing and shaking her head. We learned later that she jumped a barbed wire fence to get back into the woods, where she stayed for the rest of her life.

Big Flurry never knew that I had set Mack on Sammie. He looked for Mack with a club, but we hid the poor cur for two days.

As dry summer succeeded the wet spring, green grass became more scarce in the pasture, the supply of milk was cut down, and the cows were less willing to leave off their wild hunt for food to come to the corral for milking. The August drought, an annual phenomenon of Kansas weather, found our wild milch cows on strike. They refused to be milked. Perhaps they had decided that it was hardly worth while for anyone concerned. But their recalcitrance was the cause of much misery to Van and me.

It was our responsibility to bring up the cows. Sometimes one of us went to the woods alone on this mission, sometimes we undertook the job together. In the lush days of spring, when the cattle were in good humor, the job was easy. We walked down the quarter-mile-long lane to the foreland pasture, and found the cows, together with a motley herd of steers, heifers, calves and a bull, contentedly resting under a pair of cottonwood trees. Or they might be grazing lazily, fighting the early flies without much bitterness. We walked out behind the herd, took up position between it and the underbrush, and began shouting mild commands. The herd complacently walked to the lane and through it to the corral.

This idyllic situation vanished as the grass in the pasture became exhausted. The cattle roamed deep into the woods, seeking the little spots of grass that grew in clearings. Van and I knew where each of these spots was. We started with the big one, which was only four or five acres in extent, at our south property line. If we found the herd there, we had to drive it through a cottonwood grove that was fairly free of brush, and then along the pasture for an eighth of a mile, to the lane.

The critical point was where the cottonwood grove ceased and the big pasture began. The underbrush area came out into the

pasture here. A ringleader among the insurgent cows would break from the herd at the exact spot where the underbrush came closest. If she could make the mad dash across an open space only fifty feet wide, she would be safe in the underbrush. While one boy was trying to get her out of the brush or hold the other cattle in line, another daring one would make the break, and then the whole herd would go galloping for the brush.

The trick was to harry, badger and bedevil the ringleaders, and so poke up the followers, that we could get the herd past that peninsula of brush. Afoot, with bare feet avoiding the sandbur patches as much as possible, we had little chance. Sometimes we would ride horses, but the plugs available to us were not cow ponies. They took a long time in turning around. The cunning wild cows knew their shortcomings well, and circled around the horses to great advantage.

As the dry summer wore on, we had to step up our strategy. The cattle were drinking at the Buffalo Wallow, so long as its water lasted. Thus they did not have to come to the corral for water, or would come furtively, at noon, when they weren't wanted.

Now they hid deep in the woods when evening came on. Often it took an hour of searching through thick underbrush to find the herd. Then the cattle played tag with us. The herd would break up into small units, or scatter through the brush, every cow for herself.

We trained our three dogs to go into the brush and chase the wild brutes out. Old Red, a mean-tempered fighter with crooked horns, would back into a thicket of poison thorn, completely flanked by wild plum and twisted grapevines. We could not get near her on horseback or on bare feet. But the brave dogs would go in and fight for us. Red would swing her horns and charge as the dogs bit at her nose, nipped her belly and legs, and pulled her tail, barking furiously all the while.

To aid in such extreme cases, I made harpoons out of long, straight shafts cut from trees. I collected broken hoes. The hoe-handle usually was left intact, with the shank of the hoe, by which the blade had been attached, firmly fastened still. I straightened

and sharpened the steel shanks. These hoe-handles made fine harpoons to launch from the deck of Old Bones at a cow that hid in a thicket. I carried sacks full of clods and pieces of bricks to throw at the cows.

Still, we came home more and more often without the cows. Our parents, never having had to do the trick, blamed us for inefficiency. We blamed each other.

Like most of our farm troubles, all this could have been avoided by a little intelligent effort. The Old Man could have fenced the Buffalo Wallow, drained it, or filled it in. By locking the gates against the cows in mid-day, they could have been forced to come up in the evening for water. The brush thickets that reached out into the pasture could have been cut down with little labor, in winter, and the driving of the cattle thus been simplified. Or one could have arranged not to keep more cattle than one had pasture for. Still better, one could have kept half a dozen good milkers, all of one breed, and had no trouble at all.

When the pasture was hopelessly gone, burned up by the hot winds, the cattle ate the leaves off the brush. By this time the milch cows were pretty well dried up, so it mattered little that the brush leaves gave the milk a bitter flavor. When the brush was eaten or burned by hot winds, the cattle ranged along the fences, reaching through or under the three strands of barbed wire, leaning heavily, cutting their necks and shoulders in a concerted effort to break through to the corn or other crops beyond. All too often they succeeded in breaking off rotting posts and scrambling through into the fields.

Then came bedlam, with all available members of the family helping in the chase, afoot and ahorse. Big Flurry, whom we boys called General Grant on such occasions, was dashing here and there on Prince, shouting curses at the cattle and crying in a wild chant, "I wisht I was in hell!"

In two hours the herd could do hundreds of dollars' worth of damage in a field that was almost ready to harvest. Besides, the animals were very likely to get sick from the overeating of corn in the milk. Worst of all, the horses in the pasture would follow

the cows in the break-through. Being much more awkward in wire than cattle, they were likely to cripple themselves by sawing away at a barbed wire entanglement with a leg.

These disasters took on greater seriousness if the cattle broke into a neighbor's field. In such cases, Dad always apologized profusely to the injured neighbor and insisted upon paying for damages. It was hard to estimate what cash damages ought to be, but neighbors were inclined to be lenient, because each realized that he might find himself in the same predicament at any time.





*The family was squirming in a trap. The farm, if well worked, could provide a living for everybody on it, forever.*

*But none of the children wanted to stay on the farm.*

*John had shown the way. He was a superior person, in kid gloves and wearing ascot ties with an opal stickpin. He kept his hands soft and he smelled of cologne water.*

*Margaret was teaching school, and some day, no doubt, would marry a city man and live in a house with an indoor toilet and a washing machine.*

*Mother liked the farm, but she was beginning to believe that it might prove impossible to go on living with Himself. She talked wistfully of living in town, in a house next door to the church. I could see that she was thinking that in her old age she might be able to do that, if we other boys should turn out to be as good and great as John.*

*Big Flurry saw the family drifting away from him, but he was powerless to do anything about it.*

*He could not express himself in the same language as that spoken by his wife and children.*

*In a fit of exasperation and rage, he shouted at Mother from the back yard, "You're too good for me! I always knew you were too good for me! You make the children too good for me! I wisht I was in hell!"*

JIM KELLIHER, city slicker and book agent, drove into our yard one day, and a pretty lot of fat was in the fire.

He just wanted to sell Mother a book. It was some sort of all-inclusive History of the World or March of Civilization, such as book agents were forever offering. They didn't show you a copy of the book they were going to sell you. Instead, they showed you a prospectus. It was an inch-thick book of pictures, chapter-headings, and samples of the cheap, medium and high-priced bindings.

Mother was a set-up for all kinds of agents. No picture-enlarging agent ever went away empty-handed. As a result, walls of the dining room and parlor bore so many crayon enlargements that they fairly jostled the holy pictures for wall space.

As soon as Kelliher saw that array of enlargements, he knew he was going to do some business in this house.

When he had the book sold, with a cash payment in hand, Kelliher spotted Van, who was not very busy that day.

"There's a boy who could make a fortune selling books," he said. Van moved closer. He was seventeen, thin, pale, worried about getting some money somehow for an education.

"That boy has got the stuff of a great salesman in him," the slicker continued. "There's big money in selling these books. The agent gets fifty percent of the retail sale price. Did you see how quickly I made three dollars and a half just now? I do that on nearly every call.

"But I don't have much time for selling. I'm a field manager. I employ agents to sell the books, and they report to me. I've never seen a young man who had such obvious salesmanship as this boy here. If you're not making too much money farming, young man,

why don't you go out and take in some of the money that I haven't time to catch?

"I'll give you the necessary training without charge. You'll spend a few dollars for your outfit, and I'll find choice territory for you."

As the promoter's enthusiasm for Van's sales abilities grew, he decided to make a field manager out of the bright young man, despite his youth. Van should take all of Winfield as his territory. There he should sell books merely as a means of getting acquainted with bright young men and women who would go out and work for him, even as Van was working for Kelliher. Van would draw a certain percentage of the take of each person he hired.

The money for the selling outfit, consisting mostly of an enormous quantity of prospectuses, was dug up somehow, and Van, with meager clothing packed in an old canvas telescope, went to Winfield. There he rented a cheap room and went out trying to sell and hire.

Meantime, Mother conceived the idea that John might just as well get in on this new fortune that was beckoning the Driscolls to take it in. She borrowed money from Aunt Fannie, outfitted John, and John went about the book agenting business during his summer vacation in Oklahoma City.

Margaret finally succumbed, too. She told the great field manager, who called almost daily at our house, that she would take up the bookselling as soon as she could buy a good horse. She needed a horse anyway in her school work, and could not hope to do any kind of traveling about the countryside without a good driving horse. She would start looking for one right away.

On the very next day, Kelliher arrived with a sleek bay mare which he said he had got from a friend of his who would consent to part with her.

"She has been on the track and has made some wonderful records. She is a pedigreed Hambletonian, but unfortunately her pedigree and her track record were burned in a terrible fire a few months ago. She's just four years old, as gentle as a lamb, no bad habits, in perfect health. Because her owner owes me something, I can get her for you for sixty dollars.

"Her track name is too long for everyday use, and she goes by the name of Nell."

While the slicker was walking around the mare, showing her good points, she let fly a vicious kick that landed on Kelliher's leg. The victim, who was not a strong man, nearly fainted from the pain during the next hour, but pretended it was a mere nothing. "She is high-strung, and the presence of strangers, looking her over, undoubtedly made her nervous."

The deal was made. Margaret paid the \$60 out of her own savings, and was the proud owner of a horse.

A box stall was erected in one of the sheds between corncrib and stable, and Margaret spent as much time as she could in personal attention to the new prize. Inside of a week, three members of the family had been kicked and one bitten. Nell would obey Margaret part of the time, but was out for the blood of everybody else. She was unquestionably the meanest horse I have ever seen. John's wild Indian pony was merely wild. This brute was domesticated, and a child of hell.

When Ed Blood, who was the nearest good judge of horseflesh, looked her over, he said she was about ten years old, never had been on any racetrack, and undoubtedly had been knocking around the markets, looking for a buyer for a long time. She was so vicious that she was likely to kill somebody any day. Ed suggested that he would make Kelliher take the nag back and return the money if Margaret would consent.

"Anybody who would sell a horse like that to a woman deserves a good beating, and I'd like to give it to him," said Ed.

Margaret was indignant. She considered this a fine specimen of spirited horseflesh. "I'll make her behave," she said.

After all, she had whipped two strapping brutes, each 20 years old and tough, who were her pupils at Gypsum Center, and had taken a gun away from one of them. Could a mean horse defeat her?

Margaret offered Mother a ride in her new roadwagon, behind her new horse. They would go to town. Mother accepted.

It was a swanky outfit when Margaret helped Mother to her side of the seat, and herself stepped in on the right. Mother was wearing

a black Sunday dress with beaded bonnet. Margaret wore a white Gibson girl shirtwaist with standup collar and starched cuffs, a white linen skirt, and a natty little hat.

The roadwagon had no top. Mother raised an umbrella as soon as the two were settled in their seat, to keep off the sun.

Nell accepted this as a personal insult. She started jumping and bucking, kicking and squealing, standing on her head and trying to lie down.

Margaret shouted, "Whoa, Nell, whoa, stop that now!"

Nell started indirectly down the hill, jumping from one side of the road to the other in her progress, with the obvious purpose of turning the rig over in one of the shallow ditches at the roadside. At the foot of the hill she turned sharp left, which took her off the driveway and into the acre of lawn below the house.

Here she continued a rhythmic bucking, each flight of her heels carrying them closer to the heads of the two women.

Margaret kept crying her whoa orders. Mother sat erect, her umbrella held aloft in dignified manner, never stirring, except to hold her head just a little farther back when the breeze from the passing hooves fanned her face.

Margaret had one rein in each hand, and was pulling with all her strength on the Jay Eye See bit that was supposed to control all actions of this obstreperous monster.

In a sudden lurch to the left, Margaret was unseated. She fell full length in the grass, but still held the reins and kept shouting in a steady voice, "Whoa, Nell!"

Just as Margaret went over the side I, standing with the rest of the family on the front porch, made a swift dash to the scene, jumped off the terraced hill, and was presently at grips with the wild horse. By grasping the bridle at the bits and jerking the mare's head violently up, I stopped the bucking. A horse can't buck with his head in the air. But if Margaret hadn't held on to the reins after she was thrown clear, I never should have reached the scene in time. Nell would have been off and away across the fields, and I hate to think what would have happened to Mother.

Margaret got up, brushed herself off, and went to Nell's head. She stroked the bay devil gently, when all the rest of us voted for a sound beating, and led her back to the hitching post at the top of the hill. There were some broken straps on the harness, but these were easily replaced.

"Mother, will you wait right here while I go upstairs and change my clothes?" she said. "That grass I was dragged through has got me all green."

Mother sat there, calm as a June sky, still holding her umbrella. We fixed the straps, and presently Margaret came down, in a clean costume, petted Nell, and drove away. The drive to and from town passed with only one attempt on the part of the wild beast to run away.

Margaret's Blood school term was not yet up, but she paid over her money for prospectuses and supplies, and accepted territory in the hill country of Butler County, to begin work as soon as vacation started.

Meantime, she was driving Nell to and from her school, a distance of about four miles, daily, each way. At least five times before vacation, the horse ran away, creating a terrific sensation in the neighborhood, and scattering Margaret's school books and papers over a mile or more of road. Once, Willis Stuckey, a strong farmer, saw the runaway coming, crouched by the side of the road, leaped to the bridle at the risk of his life. He stopped her.

"I wouldn't drive that horse if I was you, Miss Maggie," he said. "She's like to kill you. Want me to beat her good right now?"

No, Margaret said, she did not believe in beating horses, though she was an advocate of beating delinquent boys at school. Instead, she petted Nell, to the amazed disgust of Willis. Then she thanked the hero and asked him if he would get his brothers to pick up her books that were scattered along the road. She would stop in for them tonight.

The sight of Miss Driscoll's bay devil and red roadwagon, streaking down the public highway, swaying from side to side and leaping in the air, with the lady herself, in dapper costume, holding

the reins in both hands and shouting "Whoa, Nell!" became so familiar that the farm hands used to look up from their work and say, "'Bout time for Maggie's runaway today, ain't it?"

Once, while Margaret was away, Van essayed to hitch Nell to the roadwagon and drive to church. While tied to the hitching post, the bay devil began bucking and kicking. She broke the harness, one shaft and a singletree. Van, scared white, came running into the house crying, "I'll pay for every cent of it!"

Since the poor fellow hadn't any money, this was the expression of a pious hope, rather than a promise. When Margaret came home and surveyed the damage, she was gentle with Van, and said nobody should blame him for the trouble. Nell just happened to be a little nervous that day, she explained, and proceeded to give the fiend a nice mess of bran and oats.

Feeding Nell in her box stall was a major problem. One of her favorite tricks was to kick the person who came to feed her, but only after the feed had been placed in the box. As you started to leave, Nell anchored herself across your path in such manner that her right hoof commanded the exit.

Ears back, eyes alternately on the feed and on you, Nell gave a series of demonstration kicks across the passageway. If you talked nice to her and petted her, she would try to bite you. As you approached the rear, the violent kick barrage was laid down so fast that only a machinegun bullet could hope to get through.

I found a passageway through the roof, to the right of Nell's head. By removing a certain plank, after climbing up the side of the corncrib, which was the west wall of the stall, I could make my exit upon the roof, and so home. Nell resented this so much that she began kicking at me when I entered to feed her, as well as at my leaving. I had to climb over roofs, let myself down with the feed, and climb back again.

Several times the bay fiend managed to nip me as I was making my escape. After one of these nippings, I was unable to sit down for several days. This situation was considered a major joke by the family, but to me it seemed seriously inconvenient.

Big Flurry took a cursory interest in these proceedings. He could



not understand why anybody should permit himself or herself to be bossed around by a bay mare.

One day he respectfully asked permission of Margaret to drive her horse and roadwagon to town and back, just to see what was the matter with the mare.

"Certainly, Dad, I'd be glad to have you drive her. She is a fine horse, but a bit high-spirited. She is as gentle as a lamb, but easily frightened. If she tries to run away, be gentle with her. I know she can't run away with you, but my arms aren't always strong enough to hold her."

Big Flurry dressed up in his Prince Albert suit and best black hat, with the wedding boots freshly shined. He was going on a ceremonial mission, to show to Gus Sauer and Fred Ross and Pat Gould and McGowan the grandee outfit his smart daughter had earned for herself by schoolteaching.

In town, the wicked mare had started bucking, and had kicked the shafts and singletree into splinters. Dad had spent all afternoon getting repairs and new shafts at the Mackenzie Carriage Shop. On the way home, Nell ran away. The Old Man held his seat, but he could not stop her.

When he got her out of the harness and into the stall, Big Flurry went after Nell in his own way. He used up two oak scantlings on her, and when he was through she didn't kick or bite, but stood trembling in her stall.

Margaret was crying in the house, but she did not dare go down and tell the Old Man to stop beating her horse.

The Boss never went near the nag again. So far as anyone could observe, Nell was neither helped nor harmed, as to her disposition and performance, by the beating. I must admit that most of us applauded the Old Man in this instance.

Margaret drove Nell and the roadwagon over the bleak hill country, selling books. At the end of four weeks, she came home. "It doesn't pay," she said. "I have sold some books, but my profit on them won't pay for wear and tear, horse feed, and board." She quit the job without rancor or regrets. She was satisfied that she had done as well as anyone could do, but that wasn't good enough.

About the same time, Van had to come home for lack of funds. He thought he was on the verge of making a killing, but home finances were unequal to the task of keeping him going. He had been most economical, often waiting outside the laundry for his shirt to be done up and delivered.

Van had been more optimistic about the venture than anyone else in the family. Discussing the probable disposition of the money he was going to make, he had chosen the stovepipe hole in the dining room as the hiding place for his first roll of bills. He thought the roll would about fill that aperture.

Now, Van was downcast and defeated. He was apologetic as he went to his Dad and asked whether it would be all right if he started digging potatoes now. The sense of failure was strong upon him.

John ran short of money, too, and that before making a single sale. Mother sent him rail fare to come home from Oklahoma City.

The bookagenting and field managing business had been a dismal failure, just when the family needed a lift. We owed Aunt Fannie a considerable sum. Well, Mother would pay her back out of next season's blackberries.

There was some talk of suing Jim Kelliher. But he was found to be financially irresponsible, living in a poor shack upon which he was unable to pay the rent. He got his books from a company that changed its name every month or so, and where it got its books, God only knew.

During the summer, Mother had sold Jim several crates of berries, and had trusted him for payment, while the family was out selling. She never got her money.

It was decided to wash the whole business up and look to other fields for fortune. Himself was never given the true story of the venture, and was not asked for cash for any of the financing.



*During childhood I supposed that Erie was the largest city in the world. Mother was consumed by an Erie nostalgia. The Old Man was hungry for news from there. John, with a worldly air and a stare into ultimate distance, told of the standpipe, the lake, the ships, and the churches.*

*He repeated for us the wailing sing-song of the newsboys, crying "Eeee-ree Eev-ning Herr-ald!"*

*It sounded like the call of the mourning doves that nested in the apple orchard and often made me sad at evening.*

*We younger children realized that we were growing up on the frontier of civilization. Nothing in Wichita was as good as the most inconspicuous feature of Erie.*

*Sometimes an old family friend or relative would send a copy of the Erie Evening Herald. Usually, this was done because of a death notice. Many of the notices concluded with the sentence, "Irish papers please copy."*

*John would read aloud every word in the Herald. Big Flurry would sit in the dining room until any hour of the night, listening to the news. It made no difference if the paper happened to be two months old. From time to time the Old Man would nod his head and mutter, "Aye, aye. There now."*

*Even Van had been to Erie, as a baby. He pretended to look down upon me as an untraveled, ignorant clodhopper, because I had never been to the Great City. I prayed that I might one day walk the streets of that magic place.*

## 15

AUNT FANNIE was a legendary figure, deeply etched in my consciousness, long before I first saw her, when I was four years old. One of the great events of the year occurred when a box came from Aunt Fannie. For weeks after arrival of the box I would hear praises of the sender, tales about her faith, goodness, jolly spirits and capacity for work. This was a subject upon which Mother and Dad agreed. They vied with each other in paying tribute to the noble character of Fannie.

Aunt Fannie had not had a home of her own since she "went out" in early girlhood. She was destined to be a servant in the homes of others for the rest of her life. She saved her wages, spent almost nothing on herself. Thus she was enabled to raise several children and grandchildren of other members of her family, contribute to the welfare and happiness of relatives, near and far, and keep up her end in the support of the church and its charitable activities.

She was my mother's sister, but no more like Mother than I to Hercules, despite the fact that both were good and holy women.

I was sitting behind the dining-room stove, close to the wall, on the floor, so that I might observe and remain hidden. There was a great to-do in the yard, on the back porch, at the door. Dad and Mother were bringing home Aunt Fannie, who had come all the way from Erie to make her first visit to us in Kansas. It was a night of snow and bitter wind, and the company had come from Wichita in the open spring wagon.

Dad drove the team. John, who had gone along to help with the baggage, sat with the driver. Mother and Aunt Fannie occupied

the second seat. Trunks, boxes, telescopes, valises and sacks of loot were piled high in the rear of the wagon.

Mother and the guest were bundled in coats, shawls, fascinators and the quilts. Dad wore a gray cap with flaps pulled down, but declined to make any further concession to the weather. John managed to get into two overcoats, and wore ear muffs of black velvet, lined with red silk, below his derby hat. His legs were wrapped in our only buffalo robe.

Hot bricks, right out of the kitchen oven, had been put in the wagon for everybody before starting for town. The depot-master was so pleased to be welcoming a visitor all the way from Back East that he helped the party to re-heat the bricks on the depot stove, so that feet might not freeze during the long trip home through the blizzard.

I heard much talk as the company descended from the wagon, and, on the porch, loud laughter, such as I had never heard before. It was a constantly repeated giggle, only louder.

The family at home welcomed the long-remembered aunt. I, the only one who had never seen her, kept to my place behind the stove, though I nearly roasted there.

"Well, well, God bless ye all! Oh, glory be to God and His Blessed Mother, is this Mell [Aunt Fannie's name for Marie]? Oh, wisha, thanks be to God we didn't freeze to death this night! Maggie, girl, God save you, what a pretty thing you are! And Flurrence, what a tall boy! Good for you, boy!"

Kissing, laughing incessantly, praising God and the saints, while unfastening fascinators, gloves, knee-high overshoes, and removing a battery of long hatpins from her staid little beaded black bonnet, Aunt Fannie made her progress into the dining room and the roaring fire she so much needed.

"Oh, bless his heart, there's the little fellow!" she cried, and made a rush for me. I squirmed through to the other side of the stove. She couldn't get through without burning her clothes. She ran around, caught me up, covered my head with kisses, and laughed that high-rising giggle all the while.

"Sure, he's the sweet little fellow! Good for you, boy! Ah, El,

God has blessed you with a fine houseful of children! Now, you can't get away from me, Charles! I have candy for you here and nuts and cake, all the way from Erie!"

I took the sweets and retired to my lair on the floor, listening with amazement to the chatter and laughter of Aunt Fannie. I had expected to see a beautiful, tall, majestic Lady Bountiful, like the picture that appeared on the patent medicine bottle I had saved so carefully, down cellar.

Hot tea was served while the company was thawing out. Mother, Aunt Fannie and Big Flurry exchanged news and gossip. How were the Crowleys?

"Oh, sure the dear old lady was taken, God rest her soul, and may the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. I had two hacks in her funeral."

The Goggins? Sure, there was one in that family that was taken, God rest the soul of the dear one, and may the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Auntie had had three hacks in the funeral.

So went the litany. From almost every household it seemed that someone had been called or been taken, and there followed the swiftly mumbled prayer for the departed, plus the rating in hacks of the importance of the deceased. Auntie could not go to many funerals, because of her work, but she sent hacks to represent her, and anybody could ride in them. In the case of really important personages, such as a beloved priest, Aunt Fannie would recount the splendid features of his funeral, with exact statistics as to total number of hacks, number of priests and bishops at the Grand High Mass, number of altar boys, and reputed cost of the casket.

"We say casket in Erie, El," she added. "Coffin we don't say. Casket is proper in Erie."

I was sizing up the visitor all this time, staring hard at her, despite repeated admonitions from Mother to stop staring. She was a little woman, not more than five feet tall, but had lost the slimness of youth in spite of heroic corseting. By merciless lacing, which often required the assistance of two persons, she had kept her waistline to tiny proportions. But even the cruel corset, with its continuous

stockade of whalebone stays, its tremendous brass eyelets and honestly fashioned laces, had to be liberal with the rest of her figure. She was not fat. But when such a tiny body began to spread, it became a problem. You would say she was a funny shape, and not try to analyze further.

There was a slight work-stoop to the shoulders, and a servant's habit of apologetic smiling when not talking or laughing. Standing still, she seemed always about to bow and serve, or else to kneel and worship. Sitting, she habitually held her hands before her chest in the worshipful matching of palms that acolytes use at Mass. She sat on the edge of the chair, partly because it was almost impossible for her to touch the floor with her feet anyway, and partly as an expression of unworthiness to occupy the whole seat.

Her face was as unbeautiful as anyone's face could be without bearing any expression of guile or wickedness. The cheekbones were prominent, mouth little and not improved by ill-fitting false teeth. The tiny chin was set back a good inch and a half from its rightful place in the facial contour.

She was deeply and fanatically religious, but also surprisingly superstitious. Her ignorance of almost everything outside of her straitened way of life was appalling. Her Irish-English language lacked the dignity and resonance of Big Flurry's genuine Corkonian Celtic-English. Though she was born in America, she spoke with a sing-song brogue that was less picturesque than conspicuous.

She always wore for Sunday and occasions the same dress, or else a duplicate of the same one. It was black brocaded silk, tight, long-sleeved, high-collared, and covered in front with tiny black beads. The black bonnet was tied under the chin and held in place with pins.

"I've never worn anything but black since Ma died," she used to say, "and I never will wear anything else, God rest her soul, and may the souls . . ."

The hair, tightly drawn back from the face and done up in a braid on the back of the top of the head, like a ridiculous topknot, was graying. The little blue eyes were bright, merry at most times, and full of innocence.



When Auntie picked me up, later in the evening of that first day of her first visitation, Big Flurry, in a burst of tenderness brought on by renewal of an old friendship, said, "Take care, Fannie, that you don't hurt his head! He has a running ear this long while, and ailing he is most of the time. Some divvil is hammering at him, a tape-worm maybe it is, God knows. He had the measles and the Mother of God knows what else, and then he sthruck his head on some uprights. 'Tis not likely we'll raise him at all, I think."

"Ah, sure Flurry, don't be saying that at all! 'Tis bad luck, and everybody knows that in Erie, and they never say that one of them is going to be called. Now the ear will be all right. There is a woman in Erie, and she had the very same kind of an ear, and she paid no attention to it."

This assurance was received with reservations.

"This fella wouldn't grow up anyway," said Big Flurry, "even if his ears were made of iron. He do be running and jumping and climbing threes, chasing the hogs and harses, like maybe the divvil possessed him. I'm afraid I'll lame him some day when he dh rives me crazy with his running and jumping. As for farming, 'tis himself would be the farmer with the little harm in him."

"Ah, if I had him in Erie, how the relatives would go for him! If you'd go with me, boy—"

Feeling the need of a little self-expression to back up the build-up, I cut in with:

"If *if's* and *and's*  
Were kettles and pans,  
Beggars would have plenty horses to ride  
Across the briny ocean!"

Mother averred that this was just plain sass, and ordered me to go to bed for sassing my aunt on her first night in the house.

Aunt Fannie came to my rescue, held me in her arms, laughed wildly, and cried, "No, El! You shan't touch a hair of him! He's a darling boy, and God bless him and may the Cross of Christ be between him and harm! I want him to say some more rhymes for me."

From that moment forward, so long as she was in our house, Aunt Fannie always interfered with the rigorous discipline which was customary in our family. She cried when Mother switched us in spite of her pleas. She concealed our misdeeds when possible, begged favors for us, and spoiled us as much as she could. The only serious battle I ever witnessed between her and Mother grew out of the guest's interference with the punishment of one of the children.

She loved to bake lemon meringue pies. She made them as they have never been made, before or since. At the end of a day of pie-making, she had a dozen beautiful, fat, nicely browned lemon meringue pies lined up on window sills, on the north side of the house, to cool. I sneaked up and stole the meringue from four of them. My crime was discovered. Mother sentenced me to some term of imprisonment in bed. Aunt Fannie cried, stripped the topping from three more pies, and carried it up to my cell.

The trip from Erie to Wichita was a subject of discussion from the time Aunt Fannie arrived until she left, six weeks later. There were sleeping cars on part of the route, new-fangled vanities that sensible people could not abide.

"The rich tell me them sleeping cars are very uncomfortable, El," said Fannie. "I would not go for them. And the price they want is enormous. If they know you have a little money in your purse, they try to overcharge you. The rich in Erie know how to fool them. They pretend they don't want to sleep, and they get what they want.

"Now, when it is time for me to go back, I want John to go to the depot and find out what they will sell a ticket for. But don't let him tell that his aunt really wants to go back to Erie. They will raise the price on him, El, as God is my judge. You have to pretend that you are just asking out of curiosity. If they knew you had to get back to Erie, there's no telling what them Yankees would charge."

The family took all of this with a grain of salt, but it was not considered nice to contradict Aunt Fannie or argue with her.

"I don't want any sleeping car going back. Sure, I met some

nice people coming out. There was one poor little woman, and I am saying the rosary for her every day, El. She shared my meals out of my box with me, and, thank God, I had more than plenty, for I don't eat very much. You might think I was getting fat, El, but it is gas that bothers me when I lace my corsets. I'm all swol on account of the gas, and not a bit fat. I'm sprad across the front, but it's gas that does it, and indigestion.

"Oh, yes, about the little woman, I'm getting back to her, El. I only wanted to tell you that I'm not getting any bigger at all, only with gas that makes me bloat.

"Well, may God guide and direct her. She started to tell me terrible things and her baby and all, but I know she was never so sinful as she made out, and her baby died, she said. Out of her head she was with grievin', but I know she never had a baby without bein' married, the way she told it. I gave her a medal of Our Lady, and a few little pieces of money when we changed trains at Kansas City. A couple of pin cushions full of satchit powder that Mrs. Riddle brought me from Italy I gave her too, because she liked the smell of them. But I have plenty satchit powder left for you and the girls, El, and it's what all the rich use in Floringe, Italy. Floringe, El; that's proper in Erie. Florence may be Flurry's name and all that, but Mrs. Riddle ought to know, for she travels there all the time, and she calles it Floringe. The rich pronounce things different, El, especially in Erie."

By the hour, by the day, Auntie chattered on.

"Fannie allay," said Big Flurry, at an around-the-stove conference, "you should be getting married now, in the Name of God. Aye, I mean it, so. There are some fine Irish lads around Erie, and you won't be getting any younger from this on, ourself. Take care, Fannie asthore, that you don't be making an old maid's bed for yourself in your auld age, and in a sthranger's house. God help us, 'tis some sthreeles do be getting married these days, and a fine gaarl like yourself washing the diapers of other people's gomels."

Aunt Fannie was overcome with loud giggling and blushing. She would start to talk, cover her face with both hands, and sail away into a giggle sea for minutes.

"Go along with you, Flurry, and you full of the Old Nick! Me washing diapers, Flurry? Ah, we have none of them at Mrs. Riddle's house! And I wouldn't be washing them if we had.

"Don't be teasing me now! But yourself would die laughing if you seen the brakeman on the train out of Chicago, making up to me. Ah, ha, ha, ha! As I live and breathe, Flurry, he was a fresh one! 'Get along with you now!' I says, and if you saw him git!"

Dad got a hearty laugh out of the story of the brakeman, for some reason or other. In another minute Auntie was wiping her eyes, for she had been weeping with her loud laughter. "My eyes are bad, El," she said, "I been cryin' so much since Ma died."

So I fell asleep on the floor while Auntie went over the harrowing tale of Grandma Brown and the Curse and squall on the lake.

"I am having a Mass said for her soul every week, and Father McCabe tells me not to worry, El, but I wake up in the night and I can't go back to sleep, because I keep thinking about the Curse. But sure, there was a woman in Erie . . . same kind of thing . . . and she paid no attention to it. 'Tis a sin to be worryin', as Father McCabe told me himself."

There was this story concerning Aunt Fannie, her mother, and some others. I heard it darkly alluded to in my childhood, but somewhat circumstantially after I had grown up.

The man who was engaged to marry Margaret Brown was not really in love with her, but with Fannie. Margaret was not in love with him, but Fannie was.

Mother Brown decreed that Margaret should marry the man. Just before the date appointed for the wedding, Margaret died of heart disease—or of a broken heart, if people really die of that widespread ailment.

After Margaret's death and a suitable period of mourning, the lover renewed his suit for Fannie's hand. Mother Brown handed down an irrevocable decision. It would be a sin against the dear dead girl for Fannie to marry the man whom Mother Brown had designated for Margaret.

So Fannie went out to work in other people's houses and to raise other people's children.

Once, when Mother and Big Flurry were at war, Mother was crying and complaining against her fate, Aunt Fannie being the audience and I merely a hanger-on. Mother brought up the fact that her mother had forced her to marry Big Flurry, and the additional fact that she had prevented Fannie from marrying the man she wanted, plus the fact that she had killed Margaret by trying to force her to marry a man she did not love.

Aunt Fannie said, "God forgive you, Ellen, for talking that way about Ma. Hasn't she trouble enough getting into heaven on account of the Curse? I pray night and day that God will forgive her."

When it was time for her to go back to Erie, mighty preparations for the journey went on for a week. The lunch box, packed with fried chicken, pickles, bread and butter, cake, cookies, apples and all manner of roast beef, would have delighted the hearts of a couple of soldiers.

Afterward, there were other visits. These took place while Aunt Fannie's employer was traveling in Europe, and the house was closed.

The employer, during all those years, was Mrs. Riddle, or perhaps we should say Mr. Jack Riddle, master of the gloomy old mansion at 529 West Sixth Street, in Erie. Jack Riddle was a retired millionaire of the old school, keeping up an establishment with the aid of an extravagant family that had a difficult time spending all the available money. The long, massive, unattractive mansion was peopled by a corps of servants, headed by Aunt Fannie. There was a son, Buzz, and a daughter, Bessie. I long nourished a grudge against the son, because a pair of his needle-pointed dancing slippers, sent in one of Auntie's boxes, ruined my feet. I had to wear them to school, for lack of other shoes. They didn't fit me, nor, indeed, would they fit any human being. They made me ridiculous, the jest of the school. And, besides, they gave me hammer-toes.

In due time Buzz, I was told, became a physician, and Bessie a divorced baroness, as well as a writer of frothy romances for the lending libraries.

When the children were in their growing years, their troubles

were Aunt Fannie's troubles, and their victories were hers. Meantime, relatives' children were coming along, and all who needed a friend looked to Aunt Fannie.

Housecleaning season in the tomb-like mansion of the Riddles was a time of rejoicing at our house. The mistress of the mansion ripped out draperies, small furnishings and knickknacks galore, to make room for new extravagances.

Aunt Fannie was given her choice of some wagonloads of the discarded fineries. She had them packed in great boxes and shipped them to her sister in Kansas.

There would be a notice in the mail that a box of merchandise was waiting at the Rock Island freight depot for Ellen Driscoll. Mother would tell Dad about it, so that there might be a team ready tomorrow to bring the box home.

After John had graduated from business college, Dad always designated him to go after the Aunt Fannie box.

"Let The Lawyer take Prince and Perry and get the box," he would say. He spoke of John as either J. E. or The Lawyer, sarcastically. He thought the business college signature, J. E. Driscoll, a lot of "vanyitty," and he was impressed by the fact that John had studied commercial law.

"If it's a box from Fannie, God bless her, and it's at the depot, I suppose it would take a lawyer to get it out, ourself. The Lawyer can't curry a horse, and he don't know a belly-band from a crupper, but I suppose, after all his schooling, he can get a box out of the depot."

John would take the bill of lading, scrutinize it carefully, and announce, "Freight charges are prepaid."

"Ha!" commented Big Flurry, through his whiskers. "'Tis something we get indade for all the schooling, thanks be to God! It takes a lawyer to keep them from getting blood out of a turnip, allay. If there was expense attached to it, where would the money come from? Could I squeeze it through me shins? Aunt Fannie, God bless her, knows better than to have any expense attached to it. I don't have to go to business college to know that."

John merely arched his eyebrows and turned to making ovals

on sheets of white paper. He used faintly ruled foolscap, which he bought by the ream when Mother had butter or blackberry money. He used Arnold's blue-black ink, which he bought in quart stone jars. He used Eagle Falcon pens, and they came in gross lots. The penholders were of wood, with cork grips.

All of this was outside Big Flurry's world. Seldom indeed would he remain in the room while J. E. made ovals. But when there was a letter from Fannie, and a bill of lading, he was glad to hear about it.

John picked up the bill of lading again and examined it more carefully than before, while he rested the muscle of his right arm. He read aloud certain sententious sentences from the fine print. They seemed meaningless to us, but they sounded wonderful, like the music of the organ at school when it played the hymn about casting down their golden crowns beside the crystal sea.

"As fine a legal document as I ever read," said John, laying down the bill of lading as the family prepared for evening prayers.

"Well," said Big Flurry, "I guess I'm best go out and bed the harses. Harses knows nothing about legal doccyments, but they don't like to lie in their own manure!"

John filled one more page with ovals while the rest of us waited for him to take the prayer book and lead the evening prayers. The family was silent. Everybody was wondering what would be in the box from Erie.

When we had finished the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, and each one was about to begin his own private prayers, Mother said aloud, "God bless Aunt Fannie, and grant her what her heart desires."

I curried the team for John next morning, hoping that I might be selected to go along and witness the miracle of a smart big brother making the officials at the railroad give up the box from Erie. I could not reach to the top of the horses, but I curried the upper part of the necks while standing on the manger, and did the backs by crawling out astride the horses. I had Prince and Perry shining before breakfast.

At breakfast John indicated that Van should accompany him.

"He is stronger than the other fellow," said John. "And more familiar with the city," he added. Well, I would spend the forenoon looking at Van's scrapbook and fixing up certain trading deals about clippings that he had and I wanted for my scrapbook. And, after all, I'd see the box when it was opened.

There never was any need for a strong man at the freight depot. Laborers hoisted the box into the wagon. John could not have assisted anyway, because he was dressed up in a good blue worsted suit, detachable white cuffs showing below the sleeves, wing collar, ascot tie, and opal stickpin. And, of course, the \$5 Dunlap derby and Hanan vici kid shoes.

When the box reached home, John backed the farm wagon up to the south porch, after lowering the end-gate. It took him a long time to accomplish this maneuver, for he was not skilled in handling horses.

On one of these occasions Dad happened to come in from the field just as the wagon was backed up and J. E. was surveying the situation, planning how the great box could be transferred from the wagon to the porch.

I suspect that the Old Man had been watching. He wouldn't pretend that he was curious about the box from Erie. But he happened to be in the yard, instead of in the field, when John was proposing that the box be opened and partly unpacked in the wagon, and then transferred to the porch on rollers made of short lengths of gaspipe. We had tons of salvaged gaspipe around the place.

The ingeniousness of this engineering scheme captured the imagination of the family.

"Hay!" shouted Big Flurry, coming up to the wagon. "Is it the box from Erie ye wants moved? Sthand out of the way!"

Ignoring The Lawyer, he climbed into the wagon, hoisted the box to his back, and, holding its rim with hands over his shoulders, walked quietly with the burden to the kitchen door.

"Ye'll have to open it here on the porch," he said, gently depositing the box in a corner. "It won't go through the door. Be careful of



the boards from the box, byes, for I might need them to patch a gate."

The last sentence was addressed to Van and me.

Mother, full of happiness about the box from Erie, and inwardly sensing the Old Man's interest in it, gaily suggested, "Come on, Flurry, and help us open the box. Let's see what Fannie sent us!"

The Boss looked up from the position he had taken on the ground, beside the porch, sidewise, as if it were not worth while to turn full face to answer such a challenge.

"Great God in heaven, Wooman, do you think I have nothing to do but play with silks, same as Mither Bliss at Cash Henderson's shore? There's weeds in the caarnfield, Wooman, and they pays no mind to legal doccyments!"

With that he was off to the field, but I could feel the urge in him to return and peek into the wonderful box from Erie. What a strong man, I thought, who can turn his back upon Paradise and go back to fighting his horses!

There were bolts of blue-and-white gingham to make wrappers and dresses for Mother and the girls. Bolts of printed cotton, yards of silk. These, of course, had been purchased at the stores in Erie out of Aunt Fannie's hoarded dollars.

But the real nuggets of treasure were the exotic articles from foreign lands. The Riddles traveled much in Italy, Switzerland, France and Germany, and had an uncontrollable passion for picking up loot, souvenirs, useless gadgets and hideous ornaments. There were six rectangular glass paperweights, with scenes of Rome on the underside, facing up at you. There were vast expanses of commercial photographs of Italian scenery, with Italian captions. Vases, coffee cups, spoons and paper knives, picked up in Naples, Berlin, Berne, Amsterdam.

One of the most numerous items was perfume. A favorite container was a small glass phial attached to a card on which was a picture of the flower which was supposed to be represented by the scent. Each card was an easel, supported by a folded cardboard post at the back.

The Riddles apparently bought this kind of junk by the gross in Venice. They cleared it all out before starting on the next European trip, 'because there would be a heavy cargo of new loot coming in.

Our family was not strong for sophisticated perfume. The girls and John made rosewater out of roses from our own garden, according to a recipe found in the *Ladies' Home Journal*. John bought the indicated drugs at Gus Sauer's drug store, and had them charged. We always had a charge account at Sauer's store. The jar of rosewater, holding a quart, was kept on the girls' bureau, but John was free to use a little on his handkerchief on Sunday.

Further use of perfume was inhibited by the fear that the Old Man might object, should he smell it on a member of the family. He had been heard to condemn big-bugs and grandees, as well as the lesser townies, for the way they stunk in church and on the streets. A man had to go to Fahey's saloon sometimes to keep from vomiting after smelling some of these big-bug women in church.

So perfumes in fancy little packages from Vienna, Venice and Valladolid were carried in our pockets to school and given to the farm boys to take home to their sisters and their girls. We were cautioned not to spill any of the stuff on our clothes, lest there be trouble with Himself.

But the sachet bags, pads, cushions and reticules were thought harmless. We first heard of this form of millionaire vanity from Aunt Fannie, who explained about the innumerable sachets she sent in all boxes. Mrs. Riddle couldn't help buying them wherever she saw them, and to rescue the big house from utter desolation by sachet perfume, she unloaded scoopfuls of them on Auntie.

Pincushions a foot square and very fat, surrounded by ruffles four inches wide, were filled with sachet powder having a heavy, Latin flavor, suggesting moonlight under palms, with just a touch of dusky skin somewhere in the background. Two of these pincushions were on the girls' bureau. The rest of them were stored in clothes closets.

We always called the Riddle powders and devices satchits or satchit powder. That was what Auntie called it, and we knew

that she was close to the best people in West Sixth Street. There was plenty for the neighbors and townie friends, but one had to be careful about giving away this kind of stuff. One might be suspected of being some peculiar sort of foreigner.

Buzz Riddle was attending St. Paul's School, and was connected with the school magazine. This conservative, scholastic, and somewhat stuffy publication was included in every box from Erie. Auntie pointed out to us that the young man of her household was a distinguished person, as why shouldn't he be? Hadn't his father lost a leg in target practice and won numerous cups and medals in a shooting club?

I used to try to plow through the magazine from St. Paul's School, because I was of the fatuous opinion that this must surely represent culture. No use. It was a foreign language.

There was in one Aunt Fannie box a woolen bathrobe that Buzz had worn and discarded. During five or six winters of croup, bad colds, pneumonia and sniffles, that was my nightgown. It was mended, patched, reinforced and altered until it fell to pieces. Dr. Buzz, be you living on earth or among the saints of God, I salute you! But damn those needle-toe shoes.

Some of the costumes that had been worn by Mrs. Riddle and Bessie and discarded after one or two or three wearings, could be made over under the skilled hands of the farm woman who had been such a diligent pupil of Mrs. Kelcy's. In truth, there was never a scrap of fabric that couldn't be put to use in our home.

The grandest box of all contained a full set of drapes from the Riddle drawing room. The mistress had decided to redecorate this stately hall, and everything was cleaned out. I believe Aunt Fannie had to buy the boxful of drapes from her mistress this time, but the price was distinctly reasonable.

The drapes were suitable for a formal hall of great length, breadth and height. They were of extremely heavy brocaded silk of a beautiful, lustrous shade of blue. It was comparable to the modern shade called dust blue, but much more brilliant and delicate. There was no color pattern and no color relief or contrast. The brocade was patterned in tiny squares, with delicate lines interlacing.

Valances were about 18 inches deep, plus a heavy fringe, six inches long. All of this material was double lined with heavy white silk. The curtains were tied back with silk ropes as heavy as a hawser for a sixty-foot cruiser. Each tie was at least five feet long, with wooden balls, covered with heavy silk, and heavy fringe, at each end.

The job of cutting down and fitting this mass of heavy drapery to our parlor was a task for a hard-working interior decorator. Mother undertook it, with the help of Marie, and carried it out with brilliant effect. The brocaded fabric itself was as heavy per square foot as Big Flurry's mainsail. Cutting it was a problem, since no ordinary pair of scissors could do the job. Mother managed it perfectly with one of Dad's old razors.

The parlor wasn't in good condition at the time. A patch of plaster had fallen in the southwest corner, and Mother hadn't enough money to replace it. Even if it were repaired, complete re-papering of the ceiling would be necessary, and there wasn't enough paper left from the last job of papering to cover the spot.

The very first decision was that the southwest corner should be made into a cozy corner. The *Ladies' Home Journal* had been showing many pictures of cozy corners, which were coming into their own. Only those who could afford heavy draperies could have nice cozy corners in their parlors.

Mother and Marie cut out enough silk lining from the spare drapes to make a ceiling that would be softer and more cozy than plaster, for the corner. Probably the silk wasn't pure white, but a sort of oyster-white. Anyway, tacked up gracefully, over a backing of cheesecloth, it looked elegant.

Now the heavy drapes were hung, from ceiling to floor, on a specially devised rod extending from the walls and forming the arc of a circle. The heavy fringed valance went across the whole arc. The curtains were tied back on each side, one to the south wall, the other to the west.

The golden oak settee, upholstered in a matching shade of blue, was installed cater-cornered in the cozy corner, and the picture was complete. Later, the piano occupied this place of honor.

There were three windows and two doors in the parlor. The two north windows and one west window were treated alike. Heavy wooden rods were firmly installed above them, extending some distance beyond the casings. The heavy curtains and valances were hung on these poles by means of brass rings. The drapes reached to the floor, plus a foot or so, and each was tied back with the heavy silk ropes with enormous tassels.

It was decided to make something of the very commonplace doorway leading from the dining room into the parlor. The unimpressive appearance of this entrance to the best room in the house had worried Mother and the girls for years. Once they had installed dark red hangings on the dining room side to hide the ugliness of the door.

Now the door was taken off its hinges and stored in the cellar. The passageway was draped fore and aft with heavy sliding curtains. On the parlor side, the blue brocade was effectively used, and a plainer, less formal drape was installed on the dining room side. That passageway became the central point of interest of the decorative scheme of the house, and the weight of the drapes, when pulled close, was such that the cold of the unheated parlor was kept from penetrating into the dining room in winter.

Thus ten of the Riddle curtains were made use of, along with many yards of tasseled valance and heavy silk rope. Our parlor became noted, far and wide, the length and breadth of the Valley, for its splendor. One assignment in English composition in Riverside School that winter was to write an essay on parlors. Helen Horner's essay read thus:

"Mrs. Horner has a parlor.  
Mrs. Stuckey has a parlor.  
Mrs. Leonard has a parlor.  
Mrs. Balch has a nice parlor.  
Mrs. Driscoll has a very nice parlor."

Here was fame. It was not easy to make the rest of the parlor live up to the drapes, but that was accomplished, to some extent, as the years passed. Aunt Fannie furnished many exotic items from

the collections of her traveling mistress, to help the red cherry center table, the two whatnots, the long shelf and the corner tables to look citified.

On one of her visits to Kansas, Aunt Fannie brought along Little Fan. She was Fannie Lynch, young and beautiful daughter of Mary Brown, sister of Ellen and Fannie, who had married Mike Lynch. Fannie was about the age of our Margaret. She was highly emotional, cried easily, and had been somewhat spoiled by Aunt Fannie, who had had much to do with her raising after the death of Mary.

Fannie was engaged to marry a machinist named Tom Kennedy, in Erie. She said little about him, but showed his photograph and the engagement bracelet he had given her, with much pride.

Aunt Fannie attended to the pressagenting of Tom Kennedy. He was represented as a paragon of all the virtues. His character, industry, inventive genius, holy life and keen wit were expounded, exemplified. Yes, Auntie was a prime promoter of this match.

One morning Auntie came down to breakfast in a state of excitement.

"I was looking out of the stairway window to the west," she said, "and as God is my judge and I hope to die before I leave this spot, I saw two of your animals going through the hedge over into Harrison's farm. They are lost to ye forever, I suppose. As sure as I hope to go to heaven, El, I can't understand why ye are so careless with your animals. Tom Kennedy would never be that careless. If he owned this farm, his animals wouldn't be going over to Harrison's."

With some puzzlement, we inquired what kind of animals these were. Horses? No, much smaller. Cattle? No, no! Hogs? No, much smaller. But bigger than cats, and sort of dun-colored. They just skipped or hopped through the hedge.

The family burst into an uproar of merriment. We explained that these were wild jackrabbits, without value, and that we would much rather that they'd be eating bark off Harrison's fruit trees than off our own.

Aunt Fannie smiled and giggled a little at her error, but, when the laughter had died down, she said, "Well, anyway, Tom Kennedy would make some use of them animals, and not have them trotting around the country like wild goats."

A prairie fire came sweeping across the uplands east of the river, darkening the sky with smoke by day and lighting it to the zenith with a fierce red glow at night. An east wind brought a shower of light ashes to our farm.

Aunt Fannie stepped out on the back porch on some domestic mission, late in the evening. She let out a shriek.

"El, God save us! El, El, Holy Mary help us!"

Mother and the rest of the family rushed out. There stood Aunt Fannie, crossing herself and trembling, face toward the glowing eastern sky.

"Don't ye see, somebody is trying to burn down the farm? Why do ye stand here like goats? It's probably the A. P. A.'s, God forgive them, that are burning out the Catholics! Call Flurry, call the men, in God's Holy Name!"

This was not a laughing matter. It was easy to see how a stranger might fear that devastating whirlwind of fire that was consuming the grass of the high prairies. But we knew that the river was too wide for the fire to cross. We explained patiently to Auntie that these fires came every fall, and that there was no danger to the Valley farms. She would not believe any of our assurances until she saw Big Flurry going about the slopping of the hogs without even looking up at the spectacle to the east.

She shouted to him to open his eyes and see the farm burning down. Dad looked up for a moment, set down his swill buckets. After enjoying the lurid, flaming pattern for half a minute, he turned and said, "Aye, Fannie, 'tis a fine perarie fire. Ye can't see the like of it in Erie." Then he went about his hog-slopping.

Auntie went into the house, retired to the dining room, and said her rosary. When she emerged she was calm. But she had her final shot.

"I never saw the likes of ye for letting things go. Tom Kennedy

would never permit them to be setting fires so close to his farm. Ye may laugh, but Tom knows all the precinct captains, and somebody would suffer for it!"

When I had croup and was thought to be choking, Aunt Fannie stood by the bedside while I tried to howl because of the pain of the mustard plasters. Dressed in a white muslin nightgown with high, frilled neck, she went about with her rosary in her hands, her lips moving.

At the end of each decade she would move close to the bed and murmur, "There now, boy, you're getting better, with the help of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Sure, I knew a woman in Erie that had exactly the same kind of croup. She was cursed with it, but she never paid any attention to it."

Then she would go back to her prayers.

As spring came on, tornadoes lashed the green earth, spreading desolation and terror through the prairie lands. Mother's morbid fear of the twister, engendered by her early experience in Butler County, fed upon the news of recurring disasters, and every black cloud or sportive wind seemed to her to be aimed at our house.

Aunt Fannie was an apt pupil for this phobia.

When thunder rumbled through the night, lightning crackled and spat among the bending trees, and the house rocked under the push of the gusty winds, Aunt Fannie got out of bed, took the holy water bottle off Mother's dresser, and made the rounds of the bedrooms, sprinkling with hyssop all the sleepers and wakers.

This was all right with everybody except Big Flurry. He did not like being awakened by cold water on his face.

"Fannie, in the Name of God, what are you doing, I don't know? 'Twould be fitter by far for you to be sleeping in your bed like a Christian than to be sthreeeling around the house like the ghost of Paddy O'Toole that never said his penance."

Crash! went the thunder, and Aunt Fannie gave Big Flurry another shower of holy water.

"Sure, Flurry, 'tis a dangerous night, and many of God's creatures perishing in the wild storm. I think our time has come, and 'tis best for us to die at peace with God."

"Well then, you'm best be getting back to bed, ourself. God



won't be highly plazed that you do be waking up a tired man in the middle of the night to dhrownd him in holy water, at all. I've been out in the wet a plenty in me time, and I built this house sthrong so that I could sleep in it and not be rolling and pitching in the trough of the sea every time a little weather comes up. You means well, Fannie, but if you have so much faith in God, why don't you get more sleep?"

Next night she came again, with holy water and prayers, for the wind blew a mighty blast and the trees shook and groaned like masts on laboring ships.

Big Flurry was ready for the emergency. He was sleeping on top of the covers, clad in a yellow sou'wester, the cape of it spread above his head.

Next morning at breakfast, Aunt Fannie shook her head in perplexity.

"I'm sure to God I don't know what's come over Big Flurry at all," she said. "If he thinks he can keep out holy water with a slicker, he don't remember his catechism."

During her later visits, Auntie continued to report fatalities and funerals. But now she rated the deceased by the number of kerridges she sent to his funeral. By this time I was getting great fun out of Auntie's peculiarities, and I liked to trip her up. Said I, "Auntie, you used to send hacks to the funerals, and now you send kerridges. Why is that?"

"Oh, sure they're just the same, boy, but nobody in Erie says hack any more. Kerridge is proper in Erie. Two years ago the rich all said cabs, but it's not proper to say cab or hack now. In Sixth Street, kerridge is all the rage."

I became her amanuensis when I was old enough. She admired my legible vertical handwriting, which was as unskilled and unbeautiful as any handwriting could be, but still legible. She would dictate letters to Tom Kennedy (who had married Little Fan and was the father of a baby boy), to her brother Will, to Kate Lynch, sister of Fan, and many others.

I wrote as she dictated, and had no trouble keeping up with her in longhand.

Every letter began: "I received your welcome letter and was very

glad to hear from you. I hope this finds you in the pink, as indeed it does us, thank God."

I often tried to vary this formula, but seldom with success.

"No, Charles, that's the way they start a letter in Erie. It's proper among the rich," she would say with finality.

In a letter to Tom, she commented upon some purchase. "Tom, I think the price is enormous. The quality is good, but the price is enormous. I think they have their gall, charging such an enormous price."

I wrote out a first draft, but changed two of the enormouses, using synonyms.

"That's wrong there, Charles," she said, gently. "Change that to enormous."

"But Auntie, you've used that word five times altogether in one letter. Won't 'big' and 'too high' do just as well in two instances?"

"No, Charles. I'm sorry to correct you, because you are a smart boy, but enormous is proper in Erie."

After a letter was completed, in ink, from rough draft in pencil, Auntie would read it over carefully. Then she would start her editorial notes on the margins, at the end, above the dateline, wherever there was white space. The notes on a given letter would read about this way:

"Don't show this to Aleck."

"Say nothing to Nora about this."

"Don't tell Kate I wrote to you at all."

"Keep this to yourself."

These warnings seemed to be essential to the completion of the letter. Under no circumstance was there ever anything in any letter that could not have been published on telephone poles without exciting interest, say nothing of stirring up trouble. Perhaps the only tidings in the communication included the state of everybody's health, the kind of weather we were having, and the probable time of her return to Erie. No military censor could surpass Aunt Fannie in the absurdity of prohibitions.

She exhibited a similar tendency to innocent stealth in her daily comings and goings. Members of the family who visited Auntie in

Erie reported that she never went out for an hour or a day without warning the household:

"I'm going to the dentist, but if Mrs. Kelly should call, be sure to tell her I've gone to the butcher's. I think the tailor may come. Just give him that black dress and say nothing. If the baker boy should ask for me, say that I'm at the grocer's. Tell none of the women that I'm at the dentist's, but you can say that I've gone to the doctor's. Tell Nora nothing."

When she went to Wichita on a shopping tour with Mother, Auntie always brought home some secret packages. These were extracted from the general pile and guarded as though they might contain the plans for a new incendiary bomb. They were hidden away in Auntie's corner of the closet and a ton of goods piled on top of them. When discovered, in course of time, they were rarely more secret than a new blouse, a box of handkerchiefs, or, at most, a corset cover.

As Big Flurry and his wife began to drift apart, quarreling often and seldom making up, Aunt Fannie tried to use her good offices on both sides. But she was an awkward peacemaker, for she never could understand what the two were quarreling about. Indeed, that was difficult for most people to comprehend, for the issues in any given quarrel always seemed trivial or vague.

Auntie was sad with a dull foreboding when she left for home on her last visit to her sister and her sister's family.

She said goodbye to most of the family the night before her early morning take-off from the farm. She choked on unshed tears, and had to go outdoors to cough.

"Let ye stay in bed in the morning, boys and girls," she said. "John and El will drive me to the train. I don't want all of ye making goats of yourselves in the morning. God bless ye and keep ye all in the hollow of His holy hand."

*We never considered ourselves poor people. Money was lacking, to be sure, but we owned our fine bottom farm.*

*Poor people were city dwellers, Negroes, or what was known as poor white trash. Even our hired men, who worked for sixty cents a day, were not poor. Many of them owned their modest homes.*

*Renters sometimes were poor people. They were shiftless folk, permitting their homes to go to rack and ruin, and neglecting to plant flowers in their yards. When we passed a ramshackle house on the way to town, Mother would say, "Renters live there. You can always tell."*

*In our neighborhood lived a few families of poor white trash. They had come in by covered wagon, squatted on islands in the river, or rented sand dunes that nobody else cared to farm. Sometimes they owned hounds, and caught rabbits for the market, at a nickel apiece.*

*There was that spectre of poverty in the distance, and sometimes it came alarmingly close. Would we ever be renters? God forbid! When cholera took the whole herd of fat hogs, drought ruined the potato crop, or high winds lashed the ripe wheat into the ground, we went on short rations, and prayed.*

*I once made a pact with God. If ever we should lose the farm because of bad crops and debt, He would turn me into a Negro, but never into a renter or poor white trash.*

## 16

DEBT was a normal state of existence at our house. But it was an irritant that, year by year, helped to pile up worry upon worry, quarrel upon quarrel, in a pyramiding structure destined to chaotic collapse.

We never had a bank account. We seldom paid cash for anything. Income was seasonal and outgo was continuous. Never did we get far enough ahead to use last season's income for this season's expenses. Rather, we were hoping for a good enough crop this year to pay last year's debts.

What with hog cholera, chinch bugs, drought, floods, chicken cholera and roup, high winds, hot winds, dockweed, milkweed, poison ivy, Johnson grass, morning glories, wheat rust, potato bugs, apple blight, watermelon lice, chicken lice, hog lice, dust storms, sandstorms, blackberry rust, blind staggers, botts, spavin, shoulder galls, loco weed, potato scab, rainy spells, electrical storms, chicken mites, army worms, measuring worms, grasshoppers, tent caterpillars, webworms, alfalfa bloat, alkali in the soil, crows, fruit flies, fruit worms, rabbits, moles, coyotes, groundhogs, ground squirrels, gophers, barbed wire accidents, cattle damage to crops, fire and lightning, cockleburs, sandburs, crab grass, sunflowers, ragweed, thistles, mice, rats, fighting bulls, weevil, spontaneous combustion, tomato worms, orioles, blackbirds, root rot, dry rot, termites, horse colic, pig-eating sows, hog pneumonia, freeze-outs for wheat, corn smut, rye smut, hot spells, cold spells, midwinter thaws, taxes, doctor bills, watermelon blight, hailstorms, contagious abortion among hogs and cattle, San José scale on peaches and apples, high tariff and low prices for farm produce, it was hard to save money.

There was always a strong hope that this year would beat them

all. The wheat might have frozen out during the winter, or blown out in large patches on account of lack of snow and prevalence of high winds. But there was always time to plow under the wheat in time to sow oats or plant corn in the spring. If there had been no moisture to speak of all winter, the wheat could be counted a loss early in the planting season, and you could make your plans accordingly. In a good year the price of wheat was so low that it would be better to be twiddling your thumbs and letting your horses run wild than to be working the crop.

Big Flurry kept all his accounts in his head. But at the end of the season he could, in one evening by the kitchen stove, with the aid of one scholastic offspring, detail his income and expenses. In one of the best wheat crop seasons there was a tremendous yield of fine grain, and we had most of the farm in wheat. Before Christmas the last of the crop had been sold. On a quiet evening, Big Flurry dictated to Margaret the itemized account of the fiscal year.

Seed wheat, so many bushels at so much per bushel, repairs to drill, harvesting cost per acre, hired men's pay, threshing cost per bushel. He knew each item to the cent. All right, take that away from the total received for the crop. Divide by the number of days Big Flurry had actually put in himself in field labor on the crop.

It came to sixty cents per day.

"I could hire a naygar for that and sit on me arse the year through," concluded the unhappy farmer. "I wonder would the high-tariff and low-price congressmen work for sixty cents a day."

In bad years, the grocery bill was apt to pile up. In all years the doctor bills had a way of outrunning available funds. However, the Driscolls maintained a reputation, through many years, for paying their bills. Our credit was good at any store in town. It was desirable, however, for the maintenance of such credit, to do one's buying, cash or credit, at certain stores the year around. A store that knew you when you had cash will understand when you say, "I'll have to ask you to trust me until we sell the hogs," or "We'll pay you when the wheat is sold."

In early days, Big Flurry picked the stores for our trading, because Mother was too busy with babies to get to town and look into

comparative qualities and prices. Dad's merchant friends were apt to be selected on grounds other than sound business.

Mother's first rebellion against Dad's merchandising was in the case of Tom Lynch and misfit shoes. When complaints brought no rectification of such errors as two lefts to a pair, Mother made a trip to town and visited shoe stores. She picked the Main Street store of Warp and Haversham. Mr. Warp, a short, stout, dark gentleman with Eastern manners, said he would be very happy to sell Mrs. Driscoll all the shoes she needed for her entire family at any time, and take his pay when the Driscolls had the money. No, he needed no references. He thought he knew people, and he wished his entire business might rest upon the patronage of such families. Mr. Warp probably had called somebody on the telephone for information about the Driscolls. The more modern stores were beginning to install telephones, and found them a great convenience.

Mr. Warp was sorry, but he could not sell the lady shoes for her sons without fitting the shoes to the feet. He held that it was a major heresy to accept sizes from absent customers. He would personally fit the shoes to the feet of all the Driscolls, and there would be no pay asked if the shoes did not fit and give good service.

Well, here was a problem. As usual when shoes were being bought for me, I had no shoes to wear to the shoe store. Yet it was winter, and I must have shoes. I could not go to school or to church until I had a new pair of shoes, because the soles had come off the old pair. I was staying in the house all day, reading and working on scrapbooks, and didn't mind it a bit. But one had to get out of the house sometime. I was happy because I was missing long division at school. I reasoned that if I didn't get to school until after long division was completed, I would be that much ahead. I still think that wasn't bad reasoning. Meantime, I was reading "The Pathfinder," which I had got in paper binding for a certain number of lion heads, cut from our packages of Lion Coffee. Also, I was doing some important work on a large new scrapbook. So I had no suggestions to offer about how to get to Mr. Warp's store.

"Don't worry," I told Mother. "I can get along fine until it gets warm in the spring. Then I can go barefooted to the shoe store, and

Mr. Warp will just think I left my shoes at home. I'm wearing John's gum boots whenever I have to go to the privy. They're fine, and don't even leak. John don't know I'm wearing 'em, and if I have the bellyache while he's in the house, I can stand it all right."

Mother was not impressed by this simple solution of so complicated a problem.

"What about church?" she asked. "You're in danger of hell fire now, without missing Holy Mass the rest of the winter. You should be unusually watchful against the devil and his temptations when you are not able to go to church. God will not count it a sin for you to miss Mass when you have no shoes, but you must try to take advantage of this time to do something for your soul. Study your catechism every day."

That was easy. I knew the catechism by heart, but I pretended to be studying it diligently, and made an occasional mistake in reciting my lessons, so that Mother wouldn't think up other and more complicated methods of saving my soul.

It was finally arranged that I was to wear a pair of arctics belonging to one of the girls, to Mr. Warp's store. We made the trip on a fine day, and took the last seats toward the rear of the store. Mother explained that my school shoes had got so bad that it was thought better for me not to wear them at all, so I had come in shoeless, to be fitted. Mr. Warp bowed and said he thought that a fine idea. It left him free of any preconceived notions as to what length and width of shoe I should wear. He fitted a comfortable pair of shoes on me, let me walk in them around the store, and recommended that I wear them a week before having the buttons clinched.

Our shoe troubles were over. Mother was happy about having found a gentleman and an honest man who would sell us shoes not made in the penitentiary. Dad was silent. Tom Lynch was a very fine Irishman, and he was losing our shoe trade.

Theoretically, we had one pair of shoes for Sunday and another pair for school, in winter. Actually, wear and tear, wetness and the oven usually caught up with the everyday pair about the time the Sunday pair was being broken in. Then the Sunday pair was worn while A. Beffel repaired the everyday pair.



That was the situation in periods of prosperity. At other times, one stayed home from school and worked on the scrapbooks while Mr. Beffel had the only pair of shoes under reconstruction.

Beffel was a little, dark man with a strong accent. Together with most other accented persons, he was called a Dutchman by the natives. He may have been a Hungarian. He and his family attended the German Catholic Church.

On a vacant lot on the south side of Douglas avenue, near the railroad tracks, an old horse-car had been set upon six stones, and a sign painted across the front:

#### A BEFFEL SHOE REPAIRING

There the little man worked away, early in the morning and far into the night. He never had a helper, never kept any books. He spent his spare time and some time that wasn't spare, practicing trick bicycle riding.

When his muscles became cramped and his eyes blurred from long pegging away at the bench, A. Beffel, pipe in mouth and smoke pouring upward, rushed out of his little street car, jumped on his bright red bicycle at the curb, and began a wild series of gyrations in Douglas avenue. Fortunately, times were hard, population and trade had dwindled to almost nothing in the post-boom town. So there was plenty of space for trick riding in the avenue.

We did not often have cash to pay for shoe repairs, but that seemed to make no difference to Beffel. He would gladly take apples, eggs, butter, potatoes or blackberries. When my feet went through the soles of a pair of shoes in bad winter weather, I was permitted to take a bushel of potatoes in the cart and drive to town. I would hitch the horse to the telegraph pole outside the little stranded street car, and walk in, after wrapping the laprobe around the potatoes to keep them from freezing.

Mr. Beffel would ask after the health of each member of the family separately, and admonish me to be good to my mother. "My children have no mother," he said. "She's gone, and you don't know how kids miss their mother. Yes, I can fix them shoes. They are not well-made shoes, so that makes 'em hard to fix. Hard to make

a good shoe out of a bad shoe. Just you remember that, my boy. When you make something, make it good to start with, and then she not so hard to keep going."

I sat with a rug around my feet, near the monkey stove, reading a book I had brought along. Once in a while Mr. Beffel would volunteer conversation, asking about the hogs, cattle and wood-chopping. It would be late afternoon by the time I had my shoes back, soundly repaired, stronger than they were before.

"I have a bushel of potatoes out here to pay on our bill, Mr. Beffel," I said. Then the little man would go out and hoist the potato sack into the shack, open it up, praise the size of the potatoes, and tell me to thank Mother a thousand times, and God bless her.

When we went to Mr. Warp's store for new shoes, we had to have feet and legs scrubbed thoroughly with soap, hot water and a big wash rag. Clean black stockings, heavily ribbed, were carefully mended by Mother the night before. We wore round elastic garters above the knees, and these had to be in good shape, clean and tight, so that the stockings wouldn't look sloppy. For everyday school wear we often merely tied many strands of grocery twine around our legs for garters. This was hard on circulation, but it was better than loose garters that had lost their elasticity.

After we had been dealing with Mr. Warp for two years, without ever once being cheated, overcharged or slighted in any way, a terrific shock descended upon us and upon the town. Suave, genteel, urbane Mr. Warp was arrested on charges preferred by a girl employe and a policeman. The officer, according to the newspaper story, caught the merchant while the latter, only partly dressed, was fleeing across a roof.

Mother said she didn't believe a word of the girl's accusations, and that the gentleman might have been taking a bath when the raid was executed by schemers who envied Mr. Warp his prosperous business. However that may have been, the business closed its doors before prison sentence was pronounced, and we were once more on the loose in relation to family shoe-buying.

The grocery bill was the family's largest liability during most of the year. It kept piling up through the winter, to be paid off with

potatoes, watermelons, apples, and peaches the following summer. Potatoes were the chief reliance for paying the grocer.

Big Flurry nursed an endless grudge against the family on account of the grocery bill. He had a notion that the expense was somehow due to extravagance. Not being able to check the items, he remained suspicious that unnecessary things were being bought. Else how could the bill grow so big?

I recall a dinner at which, in the midst of the customary silence, the Old Man jumped to his feet and shouted: "Eating flower, eating flower, eating flower! And the faarm full of potatoes!"

He pronounced flour in two distinct syllables, as if it were flower.

Having delivered himself of this remarkable pronouncement without grammatical form, he stamped out of the house and went back to his work, his meal unfinished.

A favorite accusation against the women of the family was that they ran up the grocery bill by buying "baking powdher" for their faces. He had observed powder on Mother and the girls when they were going to church or to town. He raged against this "vanyitty" as a heathen custom and one practiced by women of low morals. Worst of all, it made the grocery bill intolerable. Several times Mother tried to tell him that women did not use baking powder on their faces.

"Don't talk to me, Wooman! Can't I tell baking powdher when I see it?" he roared, and went on with his diatribe.

When Margaret heard about this, she laughed heartily, as she usually laughed when there was any element of the ridiculous in a bad situation.

"You wait till I hear him talking about baking powder," she said. "I'll tell him."

We looked at Margaret with fear and trepidation. She'd tell Dad? We expected to see her consumed in present hell fire or eaten by bears, if she dared to try to tell Dad anything.

It was not many mornings later that the Old Man began roaring about baking powdher at breakfast. Everybody was pale with fear of what would happen.

Margaret laughed aloud, with lilting gaiety, as though someone

had told a funny story. The Old Man looked up from his plate, a forkful of meat on its way to his mouth. I thought he was going to spring over the table at her.

"Why, Dad," she said, in the midst of her laughter, "that's ridiculous! Excuse me for laughing, but don't you know that baking powder would take the skin right off a person's face? It has cream of tartar in it, and a lot of other things that even your face couldn't stand. Why don't you try some of it on your face some day, just to see what it would do?"

"What?" roared the Old Man. "Me? You must be crazy, Maggie gaarl."

"Well, people will think you're dotty if you go around town telling that your family uses baking powder on its faces. The little bit of powder that we use is made out of rice, and it has never cost you a cent.

"Ask your friend Gus Sauer about baking powder for faces. He'll laugh his head off at you, but you'll believe him."

The Old Man went out without a word. That night, after returning from town, he said, "Maggie gaarl, you were right about the baking powdher. And Gus laughed hearty. 'Driscoll,' says he, 'you must be crazy.' Says I, 'That's what me daughter tells me, and a smart gaarl she is too.' And if you saw him laugh!"

That was the end of the baking powder accusation, but not of roaring over the mounting grocery bill.

We bought most of our household supplies at the grocery store of Dean, Eames & Dean, far north on Main street, at the end of town opposite our own. Mother said that Dad picked on this distant, out-of-the-way store so that we would not stop in for supplies any oftener than necessary. I suspect he selected it because Mr. Dean, the proprietor, was one of his best customers for potatoes and made some sort of proposition for a reciprocal trade agreement.

When the bill got out of sight in midwinter, Mr. Dean sometimes wrote a letter, insisting upon a payment on account. In such cases the Old Man roared louder than ever, swore to high heaven that his extravagant family would keep him scratching a beggar's arse to the day of his death.

Then he got a hired man and John or one of the neighbors to help, and butchered a fat steer or three or four fat hogs. Almost all farmers in our part of the world were skilled butchers and meat cutters. Dean would get half a beef or a nicely trimmed hog carcass next day for his fresh meat department. The meat would be credited on our bill, and our current purchases would be cut down by reason of a plethora of fresh meat at home.

All would be quiet on the North Main street front until the potato crop was ready to market.

Dad didn't like the idea of harvesting any crop before it was mature. He held it a crime against God to dig up small new potatoes, merely to satisfy a perverted appetite.

Marie engineered a bold and disobedient feat every year, in order to have creamed new potatoes for Mother's birthday, early in June. We did not make a practice of celebrating birthdays at our house. But Marie knew that Mother loved new potatoes in cream. By the time the Old Man gave the official permission to dig new potatoes for the table, the potatoes were as big as baseballs. I had to wait half a century or thereabout to find anybody who agreed with Dad as to what a new potato is. I found that most New York grocers sell baseball-size potatoes as new.

When Dad was away out in the field, Marie would take me with her and sneak out into the nearest potato patch with a spade. She would direct me where to dig, under a fine, healthy stalk. By mining and sapping carefully, we could get at the potatoes, no bigger than walnuts, detach the larger ones from the roots, and put back the earth carefully. We would rob a dozen stalks for a fine mess of delicious potatoes.

Thus, the stalk would not be killed, and Dad would never know. Marie would prepare the potatoes as she knew Mother liked them, and bring a big dish of them to her, steaming hot, with a wish for many happy years.

Mother appreciated this act of devotion, and that day ate her birthday dinner alone, or with Marie and me, so that the Old Man would not learn that a dozen little potatoes had been taken from his fields.

No matter how anxious Mr. Dean might be for early potatoes, Big Flurry would hold off until the vines began to die. That was the indication that there would be no further growth of the tubers. Meantime, Dean, who was a tiny man with a rasping voice and what we ignorantly supposed to be an English accent, was afraid to make vigorous representations to the big farmer. Cautiously, he tried him out: "Mr. Driscoll, we are having lots of calls for the new crop of potatoes, and the price is high. How are your potatoes, Mr. Driscoll?"

"Good, thank God."

"Can I look for a delivery presently?"

"Delivery is it? How should I know, Misther Dean? If you're expecting a delivery at your place, 'tis yourself should know the date these nine months back. I'll ask you not to be mixing me up in it at all, Sir."

Little Mr. Dean was as red as a diphtheria patient at the crisis, as the customers and help hooted and shouted and laughed, for the passers-by on the sidewalk could hear every word of the Old Man's answer.

Big Flurry, unsmiling and grim, picked up his groceries and strode to his wagon, with a growling undertone as he loaded his packages.

"Delivery, says he, the God-damned little English lackey! 'Tis lacing the Lady Pissant's carsets he should be, instead of thrying to get unborn potatoes out of the ground. Get up, Dan! Ah, Charlie, me bye, go hungry if you can't help it, but don't go in debt! And if you must borry money, get it from a Jew, but never mind the English."

Poor Mr. Dean had a nasty disposition, and was himself harried by debt, bad business conditions, unscrupulous competitors, an unhappy love affair, too many relatives, and stomach ulcers, but I am sure he was not English. The speech was a mild New Yorkese, somewhat rounded by years in Kansas.

Mr. Dean took out his unhappiness on me, next time I appeared at the store with a written order for groceries.

"One dozen lemons, George!" he called to his dyspeptic, red-

mustached, dull-witted brother-in-law and clerk. Then, half under his breath, out of the side of his mouth, "Pretty fancy groceries for people that can't pay their bill."

The list included a pound of chocolate, for Mother was making chocolate cake that week, and chocolate cake for our household meant something of an order. A half pound was delivered by Mr. Dean in person, with the remark, "Guess this means half a pound. Poor people don't order a whole pound at a time."

My face was burning when I left the store. I told Mother all about it. That night she dictated a note to Mr. Dean. John wrote it in his best business penmanship, with formal address and superscription:

"Dear Mr. Dean:

"If there is any business matter you wish to take up with me or Mr. Driscoll, regarding our account, please feel free to address either of us directly.

"In case you do not want our patronage, kindly reply at once to that effect. If it should happen that any of your help should be discourteous to any one of our children, I must ask you not to discipline him. Mr. Driscoll will take care of anyone who insults one of our boys, with his own hands.

"I wish you would attend to our order personally in future. Some clerk, whom Charles unfortunately could not identify with certainty, was insolent in incompetently filling the last order. If such an incident should happen again, I would ask that you keep the fellow on the payroll until Mr. Driscoll and I arrive. I would like the pleasure of slapping his face before my husband breaks his neck.

"With every best wish for a successful summer,

"Sincerely,

"Mrs. F. Driscoll."

I handed the letter to Mr. Dean before giving him the order. He went white in five seconds, and was trembling so that he could not even tie a package when he finished.

The order included five pounds of chocolate. Mr. Dean did not look at me as he did up the package, nor did he utter a word.

When the potato season arrived, the wagon was rolling to Dean's front door, once or twice a week, with at least fifty bushels of the

finest potatoes that could be produced anywhere in the world. Fifteen and twenty-five dollars at a time would be lopped off the grocery bill. A load of watermelons, ten dozen muskmelons, and, as cooler weather came on, a ton of grapes, all packed neatly in eight-pound baskets, helped shave down the debt.

Mr. Dean became the soul of courtesy as the scale seemed about to tip the other way. On the day when the great debt was lifted, Mr. Dean called in his partner, sad-faced, long-mustached, gloomy Mr. Eames, and a veritable reception was held for Mother and the children.

The account book was tossed into a fire especially built in the long-cold stove. Mother was seated in a high-backed chair in the rear of the long store, while Mr. Dean made up a sack of cookies, candies, cakes, and all manner of delicacies, big enough to make the whole family ill for a week.

Premiums had been given, throughout the year, with groceries. Regular customers received an album of reproductions of famous paintings once a month. The pictures were really excellent copper engravings of photographs of the most noted art works in the world. There were twenty to thirty in each album, with a complete story of the art work and its creator opposite each picture.

Although we rated as about the best customer of the Dean store, we had never received any of these premiums. When we inquired about them we were told that they were for cash customers only.

Now Mr. Dean ordered George to bring forth all the premiums in the store. That evening we hauled home a pile of art three feet high, three feet long, and a foot and a half wide. For years we learned about art from that stack of loot, and for years we bored our visitors by showing the albums.

Mr. Dean hoped that we would continue our patronage, on the same terms as usual. We did, paying cash while the produce held out, and going into debt again in midwinter.

Clothing was bought on tick, too. Mother made our suits out of old suits that had been worn by Dad and John, until that system, for many reasons, seemed no longer competent.

My dress-up clothes, after graduating late from dresses, and until



I was definitely adolescent, were modified Little Lord Fauntleroy. Suits were always blue serge, or a sleazy imitation thereof. They consisted of short pants, theoretically knee-length, but, in practice, usually not quite reaching to the knee, and short jacket, sometimes coming together in front, sometimes not.

Shoes were whatever we could get. Stockings were always heavily ribbed black cotton, with an amazing amount of ability to take punishment.

Underclothes were long in sleeve and leg, when worn. You wore underclothes in winter if you could afford them, but seldom felt rich enough or cold enough to wear them in summer. You wore shoes and stockings in cold weather, and to church in all weathers.

Outside of buttoning the shoes, there was no duty of the day more burdensome and unrewarding than pulling up the stockings over the long drawers. You pulled the unyielding cotton leg down as close to the high shoe-top as it could be pulled, and then lapped over the extra width so that you could pull the stocking up over it. The lapping was supposed to be done in such fashion that it would not show. In actual practice, there was always a tremendous lump of overlapped drawers visible through the heaviest cotton stocking ever woven.

The dress-up waist was a fearful and wonderful thing, an instrument of torture, and unquestionable proof of inherent gentility. It was of pure linen of the best quality, snowy white. It had a blouse effect, tying around the belly with a draw-string that was always getting lost at one end or the other.

Six pearl buttons matched six carefully worked buttonholes down the front. These were on a stiffly starched panel, overlapping when buttoned. A starched frill ran vertically on each side of the panel, neck to waist. The wide and deep cuffs were heavily frilled.

The collar was the knockout feature of the entire costume. It was worn over the jacket. It extended down the back as much as five inches, and out over the shoulders, quite beyond the natural extent of those members. It was square-cut, and edged with a frill matching those on the front.

All of this was no good unless heavily starched and carefully

ironed. It took half a day of Marie's or Mother's time to starch and iron one of these garments. I never had more than two of them at a time, thank God, but one at any time was a torture that I learned to dedicate to the souls in Purgatory.

The neck-band was so tight that Mother and Marie had to take turns trying to button it. Mother had made the garment, but the materials were so expensive that you could not expect to have a new one every year, just because you were growing. About the third year, that neckband tightened up so that you couldn't swallow, and you had considerable difficulty in saying "The Lord is with thee," in the Hail Mary, at church.

Of one thing we could be sure. No other boy in the Valley wore any such costume. No other woman could be found who would make such a garment, and then wash, starch, and iron it every time it was worn.

As one outgrew the Little Lord costume, several embarrassing details developed, not the least of which was the choking collar. The pants grew shorter and shorter, causing the garters to show. The garters were seldom as clean as they should be. Tightness of the pants around the belt and across the rear was so pronounced that one could neither bend nor jump with any degree of safety. The waist grew too short. Then there was a no-man's land between the bottom of the blouse and the belt of the pants, causing much embarrassment by reason of its revealing a strip of skin in summer and an area of unbeautiful underclothing in winter. I was continually being reprimanded and admonished about these shortcomings, and was often slapped severely for showing my belly in an ungentelemanly manner, but what was I to do about it? I didn't know, and I never learned.

The hat worn with this sissified costume usually was a simple bit of blue felt of light weight, fashioned into a soft crown and narrow, soft brim, with a lighter blue on the broad ribbon hat-band.

The tie complemented the waist. For solemn occasions, such as High Mass, this was a blue silk bow tie, such as artists used to wear in Greenwich Village, and Cartoonist C. D. Batchelor, of the New York *Daily News*, still wears.

One day Mother brought home from a shopping trip the tie to end all ties. It was twice as big and pi-squared and as flamboyant as the artistic blue bow.

Bright yellow and navy blue, in a large plaid pattern, were the leading colors. But there were many others. The material was heavy satin. The thing was ready tied in a tremendous wing formation which extended half way from shoulder-tip to shoulder-tip. No more struggling to tie the youngster's tie. This one was fastened to an elastic band that came together with hook and eye in the back. Of course, there was some difficulty about getting the hook into the eye under that iron collar, but it could be managed.

Mother was so pleased when she got me into this horrible costume for the first time, that she decided to send me visiting. A part of my social training was a system of visiting. I was dressed up in my best, my hair combed and brushed. There were many whacks of the brush on the top of the head because the kinks would not comb out easily and I squirmed when they were forcibly yanked out. Then I was told to go and make a call upon Mrs. Balch, Mrs. Stough, or Mrs. Holtke. These ladies seemed delighted with such calls, considering them evidences of neighborly friendship, and, in turn, sent their tortured children to visit Mother. The hostess, on such occasions, provided gingerbread, cookies, or root beer, or perhaps all three.

Mrs. Holtke was mistress of a house that resembled our own, on a hill by the river, a little more than a quarter of a mile from our house. The way led along a boundary fence, through varied fields.

Louis Holtke, master of the demesne I was about to visit, had been brought over from Germany only a few months earlier by his cousin, Oscar Bizzantz, a Wichita baker. Louis was a baker too, but he was headed for tuberculosis, so it was arranged to put him on a farm. The neighbors howled with delight at the story of one of Steve Balch's hired men, that Louis had hitched a team to the plow handles instead of the beam, and had tried vainly to plow that way. Louis knew nothing about farming, but Dad never held that against him. Had he not come from the sea, and learned to farm, after a fashion? His only complaint against Louis Holtke was

that he spent too much time singing nostalgic German songs, and too little time at back-breaking farm labor. Poor Louis could sing, but he was not strong enough to handle a big team of horses.

Mother liked Mrs. Holtke, who was scrupulously clean, a hard worker, unpretentious, and gracious withal. So I was going to make a call upon her, after having been assured that Annie Stella, Mrs. Holtke's German niece, of my own age, was not at home, but was visiting her uncle in town.

Annie Stella was a pretty little girl, flaxen-haired, round-faced, innocent, and dismayed by America. I hated her, because her mother and my mother had plotted together to make me Annie's sponsor at Riverside School. Annie, who had been in America only a year and in the country only a few weeks, had to start to school. It was agreed between Mother and Mrs. Holtke that Annie was to walk to our house, and I was to accompany her to school, over the mile and a half of country road, and introduce her to the teacher.

Van visited a terrific teasing upon me about Annie. So I was going to take my girl to school? Wouldn't the kids laugh when they saw me marching in with this fat Dutch girl, her lover, as everybody in the Valley would know. Could I talk Dutch? Well, I would learn from Annie.

I cried in humiliation. I begged Mother to take a day off and take Annie to school herself, if these savage Dutchmen were unable to do it. No. I had to learn to be a gentleman. I must take Annie to school, not only the first day, which would be her most difficult day, but all winter long. I prayed that God would pick Annie up and transport her back to Germany, free of charge and without damage. No result.

When the day came and Annie turned up in our kitchen early in the morning, all dressed up in the kind of Sunday clothes they wore in Stuttgart, I was dismayed. I walked three long paces ahead of her all the way to school. She ran after me, took my hand, and begged me to hold her hand, because, she said, sobbing, she was lonesome and afraid, and she wished she was back in Germany, where people talked a natural language.

A quarter of a mile from the schoolhouse, Annie burst into such

violent weeping that I was affrighted. I did not know how to handle weeping women. Perhaps I should admit, at this point, that the passage of half a century has brought neither skill nor wisdom in similar circumstances. A vitamin deficiency, no doubt.

"I want to go back to my Uncle Louie!" cried the maiden in distress. "He's so good to me! He sings German songs to me! I want somebody to sing 'Die Wacht am Rhein!' I don't want to go to school!"

I assured her in loud tones that I wasn't going to sing to her. I told her that a constable would come along at any moment and pick her up for disturbing the peace.

She gave me her handkerchief and made me dry her tears. I performed this service roughly, looking around frequently to see whether I might be observed by any stranger, or, worst of all, by one of my schoolmates.

As we entered the schoolyard, Annie asked, "Should they know I'd been crying?"

"What kind of language is that, Dutch? Should they know! You'd better learn to talk English, and you can't do it by bawling all the time for Germany. Yes, they'll know. Your eyes are all red."

I performed my introduction feat badly. Refusing to take my protégée by the hand, I nevertheless got her up front and said to Miss Snyder, "This kid is a Dutchman. Her name is Annie Stella Holtke."

I thought that was her name, because she was related to the Holtkes. When they called her Annie Stella, I supposed those to be her given names. So Annie went on the register by the wrong surname.

Now, on my way to pay a formal call on Mrs. Holtke in my Lord Fauntleroy suit and tremendous bow tie, I prayed silently that Annie Stella would not be there.

Just below the hill I carefully climbed through the barbed wire fence and started to cut across the barnyard, which was a steep hillside.

Down the hill at a tremendous pace, hissing and snorting, came a foul monster out of a nightmare. It was Holtke's big gray gander.

I had never before seen a gander, and had no idea what to make of this monster. As it was evident that he was about to attack me, I let out a yell. This infuriated the beast. He began flapping his wings to give him more speed. He was a gigantic bird and I was a small boy, getting smaller by the second.

At the second yell, he was upon me. He had aimed his beak at the loudest color spot all the way down the hill. The long bill hit me squarely on the neck, and as I fell back the great satin tie was in the gander's mouth and streaming out on both sides. I tumbled in the dirt, scrambled to my feet, yelling for help, and as I started to run, the gander was on top of me with both feet. Down I went again, but close enough to the barbed wire so that I rolled under it. The bird was too tall to get under the wire, and didn't seem to know how to get through or over it. He stood there hissing at me as I continued bawling.

Mrs. Holtke had heard the noise in her kitchen, and came running. She took the necktie from the gander and drove him away with a stick. Then she took me by the hand and led me to her house with many protestations of sorrow and sympathy.

To my horror, when I entered the kitchen, Annie was cowering behind a chair, weeping copiously over my plight. She came out of her hiding place, took my hand, and told me not to cry.

"Here I stand and cry too," she said, "but now you will be all right. I will kiss you nicely." And she did.

Mrs. Holtke got needle and thread from her workbox.

"You have torn your pants on the wire," she said. "I will just fix that up first."

I hadn't noticed it in my excitement, but my pants were torn indeed. Half the seat was in a v-shaped flap, hanging down around my knees.

As the good lady came with her workbox, Annie, who was surveying me fore and aft, burst into tears again.

"Oh, Aunt Gretchen," she cried, "see how he bleeds! He has tore his ass on the wire!"

Mrs. Holtke, a kind-hearted little lady, took me home to explain the damage to my clothes and person to my mother. She was melting

with humble apologies, and yet could hardly suppress a laugh at the ludicrousness of the situation in which she found me. She wanted to pay for the damage to my clothes. Mother brushed the suggestion aside firmly, and served tea and cake.

Nevertheless, the ruin of my only Sunday suit was a serious blow. The pants could not be fixed so as to be fit to wear to church. Mother patched them neatly by hand and with the sewing machine. They would do to wear to school for a little while, at least. I was permitted to wear them around the farm on school days, too, as they were not good enough to save by changing immediately after coming home from school.

It so fell out that I was able to wear the patched pants to school only one week. The following Sunday, Van and I were alone on the farm while the family went to church, as neither of us had suitable Sunday clothes.

We were idling in the pens and corrals. I was boasting about how I scared the old gander. Van was disbelieving the story and taunting me for cowardice. I told him that I was not afraid to ride any hog in the big pen.

This was the pen in which beeves were fed for the market. It was big enough to accommodate twenty steers, without giving them room for exercise. It is essential to keep steers closely confined when feeding for market, so that the beef may not become tough, or fat be worked off in exercise.

According to standard practice, Dad had a certain number of hogs "running after the steers," as was the expression. While this may be news to city folk, hogs feed upon the droppings of cattle, among other things. So, in any economical use of feed, the farmer counts upon running it through the cattle first, and then through the hogs.

A certain amount of grain is wasted by fattening cattle, too. They fight at the feeding troughs and scatter grain upon the ground. The hogs run at once among the steers and gobble up the scattered corn. These hogs are not fat. They are either brood sows out of season or pigs that have not grown large enough to feed for market.

The hogs that run after the steers are agile, for they have to dodge around among the cattle without getting hurt. Dad made ar-

rangements for their sleeping quarters by fencing off a corner of the big pen with two lines of oak scantlings, high enough above the ground to permit the hogs to pass under.

Thus the steers could not get in and disturb the hogs or steal their bedding, but the hogs could go in and out at will.

Van pointed to a tall, rangy old sow, one of the biggest in the lot. "I'll bet you two of my bird cards from soda boxes that you can't ride her."

Over the fence I went with two ears of corn. I tossed them in front of the big sow, and as she stopped to grab one up, I made a running leap upon her back.

When a big sow is frightened, she is worse than a panic in a theater. She screamed, squealed, started whirling in circles. The other hogs all came running, making a terrific racket. The fat steers, scared by the hog panic, started milling about, occasionally rushing at a hog that was acting too wild.

It was not easy to stick on, since a hog has no mane to grasp. My mount, in the midst of her panic, thought up a fine idea for herself. She made a dash for the hog shelter in the corner of the big pen. She was going strong in the straightaway when she reached the high fence and passed under it. I hadn't seen it. My forehead hit one of the oak scantlings, and I went into the mire of pig manure, face down, in the midst of the panic of hogs. Several of the animals ran over me before they were able to pause to devour me. Hogs in panic will eat any helpless animal or person. Many a farmer has been eaten by hogs when he has fainted or otherwise been rendered helpless in the pen.

I got to my feet and kicked the closest hogs in the noses before they had a chance to take a bite. But my clothes were a sorry sight as I stumbled back to the fence where Van was laughing more heartily than I had ever seen him laugh before. The sharp hooves of the big hogs had torn my pants to shreds.

I was a mass of pig manure from head to foot. My head was swelling rapidly.

There being nobody at home, I stripped off the clothes at once and jumped into the cattle tank for a cold bath. Afterwards, I gave the



clothes a cursory washing in the same tank, then went to the house and put on other garments.

There was no use lying to Mother when she came home, because I knew that Van would tell the whole story to the family, just for the fun he would get out of telling it. He told it so well that the whole family (Dad not included) laughed until everybody cried. Mother was not severe about it, but pointed out that it would be just so much longer before I could hope for any new clothes now, because I had had my new blue serge ruined altogether in two successive encounters with wild animals.

The purchase of new clothing was a serious matter. Mother's credit was good at the Golden Eagle, at C. R. Fulton's and at The Star. The Golden Eagle usually got our patronage. It was operated by Mr. I. Gross, a huge, shapeless man who wore thick lenses before his eyes and carried another pair of glasses on a gold chain for close work. He was a gracious gentleman, urbane, polite, hitching an old-world courtesy to a commercial enterprise and making it go. He had in his employ all the relatives of himself and his wife whom he could induce to emigrate to America. Once a year he had a hideous contraption constructed of silver, gold and precious stones, as a Christmas gift to his mother in the Old Country. Ed Vail, the jeweler, worked throughout the summer designing and building this monstrosity, which usually took the form of a tower of silver, with gold mottoes and greetings, diamond-studded wreaths and hearts set with garnets, suspended from the top of the tower. The gadget was displayed in the jeweler's window, and then in the Golden Eagle window, until shipping time. Its effect was to impress upon the townsfolk the obvious fact that Mr. Gross loved his mother.

We were met at the door by a salesman, but immediately turned over to Mr. Gross, who said he would permit no one else the pleasure of serving Mrs. Driscoll. He bowed from the waist and clicked his heels as he greeted us. He asked after every member of the family, the livestock and the crops. What would it be today, a nice suit for the little man?

Mother was a careful buyer. She had to keep her purchases in

the lower price ranges, but she must have pure virgin wool. She knew fabrics so well that no salesman could put over shoddy or cotton for virgin wool.

Mother spoke highly of Mr. Gross as an honest merchant. He always came down from the price marked on the goods, making three lower prices in succession, with the solemn assurance each time that "this price is only for you, Mrs. Driscoll," and begging that we not tell our closest friends how much money he was losing on the sale.

I was troubled often by efforts to place Mr. Gross in my cosmic system, and asked many questions. Was he not a Jew? Yes, he was. And a fine man, an honest man, good to his mother? Yes.

I reflected upon what I had heard since birth, how the Jews persecuted and put to death the gentle Teacher of Nazareth. I tried to picture Mr. Gross in the position of handing the nails to the Roman soldiers, but it wouldn't work out.

Then I remembered how the missionary at church had said that we were all guilty of the blood of Jesus. Our sins had killed Him, and we shared the blood guilt along with the Jews and the Roman soldiers.

The Jews had fine clothing stores and good manners, and it came to me vaguely that this might be a situation brought about by the obvious fact that they had to go to hell some time, and justice required that they be given nice things on earth as rewards for their worldly virtues, such as giving silver and gold doo-dads to their mothers at Christmas. But if we were all equally guilty, might I not hope some day to acquire elegant manners, learn to bow from the waist, and possess carloads of handsome new clothing? If it should be that I must go to hell for my sins, along with Mr. Gross, might I not hope for commensurate earthly rewards?

During Dad's time on the Valley farm, one mortgage for \$400 was placed upon the land. Big Flurry had paid cash for the farm and its equipment, but building the Kitchen Part called for more cash than he had available.

The beginning of the mortgage goes back beyond the period covered by my memory. The term was five years. The latter part of that period left deep impressions upon me.

Four hundred dollars constituted a trifling lien upon a farm that could have been sold for several thousand dollars in cash at any time. The national debt, however, has never been taken as seriously as that debt was considered by every member of our family.

Big Flurry used "The Margridge" as a whip to make the family work hard, sacrifice comforts, and live according to his standards. Just as a totalitarian government might use a war to force its people to accept a way of life and a political philosophy that they loathed, so Big Flurry, lamenting and threatening, forecasting disaster and ruin, frightened the family into acceptance of a primitive existence. Each one was anxious to do his share and to do without his share, so that the shadow of this calamity might be lifted. Marie quit using cream in her coffee. The cream cost nothing in cash, but going without it, she felt, was a form of mortification of the flesh which would strengthen her spirit for the part she might play in paying off the mortgage.

Dad's business procedure in the matter was characteristic. He did not establish a savings account. When he had a few dollars, he took them to Pat Whaley, at the latter's real estate office. He got no receipt, and Pat made no accounting.

"Here, Pat, take this, and put it with the rest, until I have enough to pay off The Margridge," he said.

"Very good, Flurry; I'll take good care of it for you."

John tried to keep a record of all the payments made to Whaley, but Dad was so secretive and so loyal to Pat that he sometimes refused to report to the family the amount of a payment.

"Sure, that money I gave him yestherday wasn't a dhrop in the bucket," he would say, and that would be the end of the discussion. Probably he felt that if the family should realize that the big debt was almost paid off, it would become extravagant and start spending money. So, only Pat should know.

Not a day passed without talk of The Margridge, how early

everybody must rise in the morning in order to earn the money to save the farm, and how vanities must be discarded for the duration of the emergency.

At the end of four years, John's accounts showed that, even without consideration of amounts paid to Whaley and not reported to the family, the entire \$400, plus interest for five years, was in Whaley's hands.

It is at this juncture that the story of The Margridge finds lodgment in my memory. I was just old enough to react with terror to the suggestion that "we're going to be put off the farm."

Big Flurry had a consultation with Whaley. Yes, he admitted, the total amount had been given him. Johnnie's accounts were correct.

Would he then pay off The Margridge at once?

Pat Whaley smiled indulgently at the big Irishman's anxious ignorance.

"Why, Flurry, no business man pays off a debt before it's due. I have invested your money. For the next year, it will be working for you. When the mortgage comes due, it will be paid, and you will have a nice investment in city property, besides."

Big Flurry dismissed the matter from his mind. Pat would take care of everything. "Sure, there's never been a stroke of the pencil between Pat and me," said the farmer, proudly. Meaning that he had such implicit faith in Pat that he never required any accounting from him.

As it developed later, there were other Irish-Americans and the widows of others, who reposed the same kind of faith in Pat.

Letters in long, official-looking envelopes began to arrive from the agent of the Lombard Mortgage Company, speaking of non-payment of interest. These were turned over to Pat, who said it was just a matter of stupidity on the part of some clerks in Kansas City. The interest had been paid, but these fools had neglected to make a note of the fact in their account books. Well, Big Flurry could understand how that might come about. Boys who were handy with the pen sometimes didn't know how to put a harness

on a harse. Anyway, leave it to Pat. He would take care of everything.

The crisis was built up through the year, by warnings from the mortgage company that it would not hesitate to sell the farm at auction to get its money. Official letters became more numerous as date for payment of the mortgage approached.

We had no postoffice box, and this was many years before establishment of rural delivery of mail. Pat Whaley had offered his office as an address for us. So our mail was sent in care of Whaley, and was picked up by any member of the family who might be in town. This kept Whaley in touch with family affairs. He knew about every letter that came in for the Driscolls.

For some reason unknown to me, communications from the mortgage company were called, in our family, "letters from Uncle Sam." I believe John originated this style, perhaps because Uncle Sam sounded more important than the Lombard Mortgage Company.

Pat Whaley was always in his office after 10:30 o'clock Mass on Sundays. He opened the office at that time, he told us, solely for the convenience of the Driscolls in the matter of the mail.

This was the procedure. John was driving the team to the spring wagon. After Mass, he drove to the center of town, where Pat had his office on the second floor of a two-story building. We stopped at the curb. John handed the lines to some other member of the family, and climbed the outside iron stairway to Pat's office. Pat in person handed him any mail that had arrived for us. John put the mail in his pocket, and reclaimed the driver's seat.

No one asked what was in the mail. If anybody was so rash as to say, "Is there anything from Uncle Sam?" John sucked air through his teeth on the right side of his mouth and pretended not to hear. That irritating sound of air rushing in between two slightly separated teeth was John's signal that he was bored. The family respected his boredom, and held its peace.

If Margaret and Marie were in the company, there would be conversation on the way home. It would be about how Johnny

Dutch (so called because he spoke with an accent and his last name was difficult) had looked in his new hat, what Joe the Janitor had said as we came in, how lovely was the voice of Perseus Russell in the Ave Maria, and whether there were really any good-looking boys in the congregation. Mother was in full sympathy and accord with the girls, and took part in the conversation as one of them. John was silent, the reins slack upon the dashboard, eyes fixed upon some impalpable concept, far away.

Arrived in the home barnyard, John portentously drew from his side pocket, the mail. He passed it out to the proper addressees with silent ceremony.

Yes, there was a letter from Uncle Sam. John toyed with the long, serious-looking, registered envelope.

"I guess this means that Uncle Sam is going to put us off the farm," he said. This was to tease me, the youngest member of the family, because I could be depended upon to howl and shout at any mention of leaving the farm. John had previously explained to me that if Uncle Sam put us off the farm we would become beggars, nomads, gypsies, no better than the red Indians who came to our back porch and asked for food.

Now John opened the envelope, while the horses stood, waiting to be unharnessed and fed. He read the letter silently, with arched eyebrows.

Looking at me, he intoned: "Yes, Uncle Sam says we must leave the farm. We must give up our home and sleep out in the rain, along the road."

I began crying at the top of my voice, holding to Mother's skirts, and pleading that we take Shep and the cats along when Uncle Sam put us out on the road. "He can't take Shep away from me!" I bawled. "I will sic Shep on him and Shep will bite him!"

Mother mildly remonstrated with John for scaring the child, but all faces in the company were sober, serious, worried. While I was bawling, John condescended to inform Mother that this was just another notice of overdue interest and approaching due date of the principal sum. He said the letter was well written, a fine piece of work. A man who could write a letter like that, said John, need

not fear the world and its vicissitudes. His place in civilization's great plan was firmly fixed.

Quickly came a time when even John began to be worried about Shep and the cats. Special trips to town for the mail were made. Dad was informed that the mortgage company said that it had not received payment, and that one year's interest was overdue and unpaid. Due date was rapidly approaching, and the long, impressive envelopes from Uncle Sam were arriving with foreboding frequency.

Dad called around to see Pat, during a day at market.

"Never worry a minute, Flurry," he was told. "I have your money out at interest, and I'm having a little trouble getting it back on time. But they won't dare to sell your farm for that little mortgage. I am like that with Mayor Carey, and he would stop the sale if I asked him to."

When he came home and was questioned about the state of the mortgage, Big Flurry answered, without perturbation, "Sure, who are we to be putting questions to Pat Whaley? The omathans in Kansas City do be making mistakes, but thank God we have Pat to look after them. He will take care of The Margridge, and never mind the old women that tells you that Pat would be stealing our money."

In two hurried trips, during two of the last three days of grace, John caught Pat in a palpable lie.

"I have paid the mortgage, Johnnie, so everything is all right," said Pat.

John went to the courthouse, where mortgage releases would be filed, and learned that this was not true. When he sought Pat at his office and home, after the courthouse visit, Pat was not to be found.

Finally, John brought home a copy of the *Eagle*, with an official notice that our farm would be sold at auction on the west steps of the courthouse at three o'clock the following afternoon.

At this, Big Flurry seemed only mildly concerned. Pat would take care of the situation. But yes, it might be all right for Mother and John to go in and see what happened.

At eleven a. m. John and Mother were in Pat's office. Mother took over the negotiations.

"We have just been to see the county attorney, Mr. Whaley," she said. "He has prepared a warrant for your arrest for grand larceny. It will be served on you within an hour after the farm is sold. It means ten to twenty years in prison."

Pat went as white as the paper in front of him. He stuttered, tried to make a sentence come out of his mouth, but failed. John and Mother went to pray in the church until four in the afternoon. The mortgage had been paid, and the sale called off.

When Mother and John came home with the deed to the farm and the canceled mortgage, Dad merely remarked, "There now. Pat Whaley knows his business. 'Tis in the state's prison we'd all be, arrugh, if it wasn't for him."





*I was more afraid of the Old Man than any of the other sons and daughters. Van had far more iron and defiance in him. He sometimes talked back to his dad, and never admitted the divine right of a male parent to cuff and bulldoze a son.*

*When Van saw Big Flurry trying to break Pansy, an awkward Norman mare, to saddle, he laughed aloud and didn't care who heard him.*

*Pansy was backing and sidling around the yard, with the Old Man, in black hat and Prince Albert coat, in the saddle. She got her rear end wedged into the door of the chicken coop, and Van roared.*

*To the embarrassed horseman he shouted, "You'll never be a Phil Sheridan!"*

*The reply from the flabbergasted and angry horseman was, "You'll never be a man, ya-ya-ya devil!"*

*To me it was unthinkable that one should shout derision at Big Flurry, even if he couldn't dismount to deliver just payment for such effrontery.*

*Van discovered that the Old Man was coming home drunk, after selling loads of potatoes in town. He took the harness pegs out of the stable wall, and planted himself by the north stable door to listen while the Old Man, three sheets in the wind, tried to hang up the harness on pegs that weren't there.*

*I hoped that God would not strike Van blind for thus dishonoring his father.*

JOHN, Marie, and Margaret liked to dance. When Little Fan was visiting us, dancing was obligatory. The poor girl, accustomed to the night life of Erie, could not be expected to be happy in listening, every night, to talk about old times between Mother and Aunt Fannie, even if Uncle Flurry occasionally added a lively note to the evening's conversation. Little Fan was at once an incentive, a fellow-conspirator, and an apology, for social life.

Our Methodist and United Brethren neighbors held dancing to be sinful. They, however, were addicted to play parties.

For the Protestant community, Mother and the girls arranged one play party at our house. From the viewpoint of a very young brother, the affair seemed a great success. Everybody had a grand time. They played "Happy Is the Miller Boy That Lives by the Mill," "Skip t' My Lou," and "We Don't Want Any Weevilly Wheat." There were other games that escape my memory. The participants walked or skipped through the figures, singing. No music accompanied the games. This seemed to be the chief difference between play parties and square dances. We heard how some of the country church folk had kissing parties, but Mother drew the line at kissing games.

There was, however, one kissing game at our party. Big Flurry came up from the stable while the party was in progress. He was in an agreeable mood. He had not been told that the party was to be held, but when the guests began to arrive he found many among them whom he knew and liked. Parents and children of all ages were there.

"Let me show you a game that we used to play in Ireland!" said Big Flurry. Since nobody had ever heard of the Old Man's taking

part in any kind of social activities, the company was impressed. Everybody agreed to do as told.

So the big Irishman placed himself at the head of a line, specifying that his wife was to stand behind him, both hands on his shoulders. The others were to stand similarly, making a long snake-line, such as penitentiary prisoners form when under discipline. Boys and girls alternated in the line.

They started walking, Big Flurry singing, "I'm a Silly Old Man That Walks Alone." That expression, endlessly repeated, was the song. After the line had passed once around the dining room, the leader stopped short and shouted, "All turn around and kiss your partners!"

That was the hit of the evening, not because the rule against kissing games had been violated by the host, but because everybody had seen a new side of Big Flurry, known to many of them as The Crazy Arishman. From that moment forward, the party was a success.

Immediately after his contribution, Dad went to the stable, and did not appear in the house until breakfast next day.

The play party must have been thought rather a futile experiment by the family, because another one was never arranged. Nor did John and the girls go to play parties. They went to dances, and we began having dances in our house.

The great dance of the year, comparable to the county ball in the England of the Brontës, was the Old Settlers Ball, held in Wichita under auspices of the Old Settlers Society. It was usually staged with pomp and circumstance in Garfield Hall, and got a whole page or more in the *Eagle* next morning.

Invitations to the Old Settlers Ball were engraved. The language in them was so formal that it sounded like a *subpoena duces tecum*. We were all much impressed when this invitation arrived. It was noted that tickets would cost fifty cents apiece.

Mother liked to dance. The Old Settlers Ball gave her an opportunity to enjoy the company of some of the salty old characters who really had settled this Valley when it was full of red Indians and buffalo. It gave her a chance, too, to see her beloved John and

his sisters enjoying themselves, measuring up with other young men and women, and being treated respectfully by the prominent people of the community.

Our immediate neighbors were non-dancers, mostly on religious grounds. Steve Balch, next neighbor on the west, wasn't religious, but his children were younger than the dancing part of our family, and not of dancing age during most of the period covered by the dances at our house.

The nearest home for dancing was that of George Robins, three miles away. George had the only brick farmhouse in the Valley, a large family, and a capacity for joyful celebration. He liked to fill his big house with gay young people and lively music. John used to drive his two sisters, and sometimes his mother, to the dances at the Robins house. There would be talk about the occasion for weeks afterwards. Margaret said that there could be nothing in life comparable to the thrilling anticipation of joy as the team approached the Robins house, and you could see the lights and catch snatches of distant dance music.

When we had a dance at our house it was thought essential to keep the news of the coming event from Himself. Nobody seemed to know exactly what would happen if someone should say, "We're having a dance a week from tomorrow night, Dad. Don't you want to dress up and join us?"

There was a feeling of apprehension. What would the Old Man do? Since nobody could answer that question, it was thought best to keep all preparations a secret from the Head of the House. Invitations, written according to the formula found in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, on white cards bought for the purpose at Goldsmith's Book Store, were sent out by mail, a week or ten days in advance. Most invitations began: "Yourself and Company are Cordially Invited . . ."

It was decided in council that we couldn't mix the town crowd and the country crowd. We would have separate dances for the two. There were enough dancing people in the country to make up one dance party, and more than enough friends in town to make up another. But the ways of town and country folk were

different. The townies would want beer. The farmers would be shocked at the idea of a keg of beer at a party. They preferred to carry hard liquor in flasks if they needed refreshment. However, the rule at rural parties was that if a person was caught with liquor on his breath he was asked to go home.

There were two exceptions to the rule of not mixing townies and farmers. Bill Calloway, a long, thin, red-faced, red-mustached bumpkin, was the best caller in the Valley. He was invited to call off the square dances for both town and country dances. Ed Blood, tall, red-mustached; quick-talking Lochinvar, had been around. He had his laundry done in town, and, though unschooled, his company manners were a match for the most sophisticated of the townies. Yes, Ed could be invited to both kinds of dances.

Before the first of the dances was held, two notable acquisitions had been made. A piano and a carriage had been purchased, after months of negotiations and wheedling of Himself by the family. Marie was a prime mover in preliminaries that led to the purchase of these two essential additions to the prestige of the Driscoll household.

Marie had attended All Hallows Academy, a high-grade ladies' seminary on the West Side. It was intended that she should spend an entire school year there, and tuition was paid in advance. About the middle of the year she had contracted measles. The sisters in charge had very unwisely permitted her to be bundled into the spring wagon and brought home, a distance of seven or eight miles, in a blizzard, while she was suffering from a high temperature and the onset of measles.

We nearly lost Marie as a result of that incident. Most of us caught measles from her and had a bad time of it in a draughty house in mid-winter, with incompetent medical attendance. Marie contracted ear and throat trouble that made her "delicate" for several years.

When she had partly recovered, Marie wanted to go back to the Academy. Big Flurry had announced that he would do anything for Manie-gaarl, even to borrowing the money for additional tuition, or making a brave attempt to squeeze it through his shins. Rather

than have the Old Man telling the whole countryside that he had to borrow money to send his daughter to school, Marie accepted his agreement to buy a piano and pay for lessons.

Thomas Shaw, the Music Man, had just the right instrument. It was a second-hand upright Newby & Evans, called Parlor Grand. The price was somewhere around \$100. Dad put up \$25 in cash, and most of the rest came from berry and butter money. Marie took a lesson once a week, for one dollar, from Mrs. Bamberger, a lively and enterprising lady who ran a general store, played for dances and funerals, and gave music lessons.

Big Flurry considered the piano (which he called a py-anno) a great piece of varyitty. He was not especially addicted to piano music. He particularly deplored the custom of a singer's being accompanied on the piano.

"What good does it do," he asked, "to spile a fine song by making a noise on the matchine so that nobody can hear the words?"

But Marie knew how to win the Old Man. By March 17 she had learned to play her first song. Big Flurry sat down alone to a breakfast of potatoes and fish, specially prepared to please him for St. Patrick's Day. And, as he ate, he heard from the parlor the strains of "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning," played by Marie on the piano.

She came forth from her playing to ask if the Old Man would have another cup of coffee. Himself was smiling through sentimental tears. Yes, he would have more coffee. He pulled her face down and kissed her as she set the coffee beside his plate.

"God spare you, child," he said.

The carriage came within a year after the piano. The family had been talking carriage for years. The spring wagon was no sort of vehicle for a nice family to be going to church in. It was away up in the air, and a lady always had trouble with her skirts, getting in and out.

The way up to the spring wagon seats was by little iron steps, on the ends of curved iron rods. To reach the first step or to step from the first to the second, and then up into the wagon, a lady

had to be powerfully assisted by a masculine arm. She also had to gather her long skirts about her, and there was always a danger that she might show an ankle or even the calf of her leg, to whatever nasty-minded males might happen to be passing at the moment. This was no way to raise nice daughters.

In our east yard, Dad set up a mounting block which we called the buggy-step. It was the lower part of the trunk of a cottonwood tree, firmly set into the ground. It had a wide step cut into the lower part, and about a step and a half farther up. For loading the family on Sunday mornings, the spring wagon was driven up beside this block, and the ladies, assisted by John, first climbed the block, then stepped over into the wagon.

The Balch family had a canopy-top surrey, with deep fringe hanging down all around. This was not thought exactly aristocratic at our house. It matched the tall, golden oak organ in the Balch parlor, with nine shelves for vases and statues. For our part, a simple upright piano should be matched by a real surrey, with no fringe, leather upholstery, and a window in the rear.

Just such a carriage was located through a want ad in the *Eagle*. It was represented to be as good as new. The family went to see it. This was certainly a high-grade vehicle. It had been made to order for a local judge by an eastern carriage company. The leather top was in fine condition, the leather splashers had been patched in only two places, and the leather dashboard was superb. The tongue was of second-growth hickory, springs were in first class condition, upholstery but little worn, wheels and steel tires excellent. Unfortunately, the window in the rear curtain was cracked. To my inexperienced eye this little flaw gave the carriage a second-hand appearance. I had always looked forward to a carriage as a vehicle with a window in the rear. To have that window cracked was something of a tragedy.

Big Flurry was besought by Marie and Mother to go and look at the carriage.

One day he came home from town in the wagon in which he had taken a load of potatoes, and the carriage was tied on behind. Marie rushed out of the house, threw her arms around the Old



Man, and kissed him. He was obviously pleased as he remarked, "Well, Manie-gaarl, that kiss cost me only sixty dollars!"

Now we were up in the world. None of the neighbors had a carriage approaching ours in splendor. None had a piano as genteel and aristocratic-looking as ours. Big Flurry had consented in both instances, but he never got over the conviction that he acted unwisely and under duress when he did so.

It was now possible for John and the girls to drive to dances in the neighborhood or in town in a vehicle that was commensurate with the style and finish of their costumes. Also, it was possible to have dances at our house, with music from our own piano.

When Dad came in for supper, he would notice nothing wrong. The tacks would have been removed from the dining-room carpet, all the way around, but he wouldn't notice that if chairs stood around the edge, to hold the carpet down. The girls and Mother would be washed up and their hair would be curled with the curling-iron that was heated in the coal-oil lamp. Maybe the Old Man would catch on. In such a case, he would look up from his second cup of coffee and say to Marie, "What goes on here, I don't know?"

"Oh, we're having a dance tonight, and we thought we'd surprise you! A lot of the country folks are coming in to have a couple hours of fun."

"Aye."

And Big Flurry would go his way. Sometimes he would help place the horses of some of the neighbors whom he liked, and even help some of the ladies alight. But he would not appear in the house during the festivities. His one appearance at the play party was his last. If the dance lasted late, he would sleep in a haystack.

As soon as Dad was out of the house, after supper, the dining room furniture would be moved out, the carpet rolled up and removed, and, after the floor had been well swept, John would begin waxing it. Floor wax had been bought in a cake. John was an expert at shaving this wax fine and dropping it on the floor. Consequently, he escaped many of the heavier duties, which went to the women and to the two younger boys.

The kitchen floor in those days was bare. Mother had scrubbed it painstakingly during the day. Now it was ready for waxing. The kitchen stove was taken out on the back porch as soon as the first strong men arrived to help with the job. Ed Blood, the strongest man in the Valley, was usually an early arrival, and volunteered for feats of strength.

The grêatest and most significant of all entertainment ventures at our house came to be known in family tradition as the Damn Masquerade. It was planned many weeks in advance, according to specifications for such events read in the *Ladies' Home Journal*. This was a fancy dress ball for the townies, plus the usual exceptions.

Marie rated as Queen of the Ball in a white costume of crinoline and fluff, representing Aurora, Rosy-fingered Daughter of the Dawn. A pasteboard diadem, covered with gold or silver paper, was shaped to represent the rising sun. The leg of mutton sleeves were so big that the belle had to go sideways through the doors.

Margaret was a gipsy girl, with lots of trinkets making a gay, tinkling sound as she walked.

It was decided that Van was old enough to begin a social life at this period, so Mother made a sailor girl's costume for him. He had to get into a corset in order to have the dress set properly on his lanky figure. All of this humiliated Van considerably, especially as I missed no opportunity to tease him about dressing up in girl's clothes.

For John, Mother rented a costume from a woman friend who ran a little store on North Main street. For a dollar and a half, payable in blackberries next summer, this reasonable lady outfitted John as George Washington, in short velvet pants with many-colored diamond shaped inserts, silk hose, resplendent jacket, and frilled blouse with lace cuffs. There was a sword, but John thought better of wearing it after it was found that it would certainly drag on the ground and trip him up in the waltzes.

Ed Blood appeared as Romeo, also in a magnificent rented costume. Being so much taller than anyone else at the party, he was easily recognized, even with his mask on. He danced mostly with Marie.

A couple that attracted much favorable comment consisted of Tom McDermott, a young locomotive fireman, dressed in Santa Fe railway coveralls and cap, carrying a lantern, and Nell Fahey, niece of Old Tom Fahey, saloonkeeper. As a result of the romance that blossomed that night, Tom and Nell were married a year later. Tom's mother, raging because her son's income now went to his wife instead of to his mother, christened the party the Damn Masquerade, and often railed against it as an evil occasion.

The account of the party in the society columns of the following Sunday's *Eagle* said, "Bamberger's orchestra furnished the music."

The orchestra consisted of Mrs. Bamberger at the piano, Mr. Blume at the violin, and Harry Felison playing a piccolo. Mr. Blume was a good-natured German who played in the choir at our church, and Harry was a bookkeeper who had developed a mean piccolo in years of spare time. On the night of the Damn Masquerade the orchestra was augmented by a second violin, Johnny Millhaubt, a clothing salesman. From the far corner of the dining room this powerful organization could make its music heard in the farthest reaches of the big kitchen. Bill Calloway stood in the doorway, chewing tobacco and calling off the figures for the square dances.

"Doe-see doe and a little more doe! Alaman left! Swing your partners, take a walk right down the middle; turn around and walk right back! Bow to your partners, grand alaman!"

All of this was barked out in a sing-song and with high spirits. Calloway was a farm hand who had made a name for himself as a caller-off. He danced a round dance or two with Marie, but he had sense enough to see that he was altogether outclassed by the gigantic Ed Blood. Poor Bill lived a long time after the Damn Masquerade. He remained a bachelor, moved to town, and drove a sprinkler wagon on the streets of Wichita until he toppled off dead, an old man, and withered.

About every third dance was a round dance. There had been some discussion in family council about the wisdom of permitting round dances, such as the schottische, waltz and polka. A bishop in Erie had spoken against these dances as being occasions of sin. Still, they were permitted on the Old Settlers programs, and even

at some of the affairs given under church auspices in Wichita, so it was thought best to include them in this program for the sophisticated city folk.

Little Fan, who was glorious in a peasant girl costume, even attempted to teach a few of the dancers a new one called the two-step, which was becoming all the rage in Erie. It was considered a little too daring for our audience. But Fan said that a very few of us might get together after the others went home, and try out this new and daring step from the East.

There was a barrel of beer on the back porch. It was furnished by the Mahan family and firm, since the Mahan Supply Co. was agent for Anheuser-Busch of St. Louis. One of the Mahan wagons, carrying no identifying marks, brought the beer out late in the afternoon. There were several big cakes of ice to keep it cool.

Dad did not come into the house during the ball. But he met Johnny Mahan, smoking a good cigar in the back yard, and accepted Johnny's invitation to have a few cigars and some beer. During the rest of the evening, Big Flurry made frequent trips to the barrel. Also, he invited some of the more friendly souls to go down cellar and drink his own home-made wine with him.

The party did not break up until nearly daylight, and it was a Sunday morning. Mr. Blume had to play at Masses that day, so it was thought proper that some part of the family go to the earliest Mass, take Mr. Blume along, and deliver Mrs. Bamberger also. As it turned out, only Mother, Van and I were left in the house when the carriage rolled down the hill that Sunday morning, about half-past four.

Mother was sleeping in her bed, and I in mine on the other side of the big bedroom, when we were awakened by a fearsome roaring and clattering downstairs.

Big Flurry, full of wine, beer and grievances, was on the warpath. He was slamming doors, stamping on the floors of the empty rooms with his hobnailed boots, and pushing furniture around. The walnut dining table had been moved back into the dining room after the dancing had ceased. Whenever Big Flurry passed this piece of

furniture he would lift one of the drop leaves and let it fall with a terrific bang. This added emphasis to what he was saying.

The lecture, punctuated by banging, stamping and the slamming of doors, went something like this:

"Scratching a beggar's arse since the day I bought the half a pound of tay!

"A half a pound of tay she wants! She conquered there!"

This recurring phrase "conquered there," was always reinforced by some terrific noise, such as knocking over a chair, slamming the table leaf, or smashing a dish.

"Mrs. Kelcy's manty-maker wants a half a pound of tay! And sure, glory be to God, where does she come from?

"God knows that knows me heart that she lived in a house, and a fart from Auld Mother Condon's harse would blow it across the lake!

"Across the lake!

"She conquered there!"

Now there would be much pacing up and down, from the bottom of the stairway to the little bedroom beyond the kitchen. Big Flurry was crying loudly, shedding beery tears for himself.

"Poor auld Flurry! 'Tis himself that was ruined by his extravagant family! And the half a pound of tay!"

Another swig from the beer barrel, and back comes the lecturer, roaring louder than ever.

"So she wanted a py-anno—she conquered there!

"A py-anno, and poor auld Flurry scratching a beggar's arse! She conquered there!

"What next, I don't know? She wanted an equi-page! An equi-page she must have like the grandees and townies! She conquered there!

"Ah, 'tis meself is no good around here at all, but back in Ireland I must be, catching fish ourself!"

I was shivering in my bed, and I could hear Mother's teeth chattering for fear.

In a loud whisper I said, "I'll get my clothes on and climb out

this window. I can slip down the porch pole easy, and run over to Harrison's. I'll get somebody to come over with a gun and make him stop."

From Mother: "You lie still and say your prayers. We don't want to be disgraced before the neighbors."

Greater than the fear of death was the fear of being disgraced before the neighbors. No matter how bad things got at our house, we must never let the neighbors know that anything was going wrong. The neighbors must not know that the Old Man was drinking much more than was good for him, lately. They must not find out that Himself was beginning to nourish a particular hate against this tall fellow, Ed Blood, who had a way of turning up at our house much more frequently than any other neighbor.

Now, the neighbors were not that way at all. Old Man Stooger was a drunkard, and everybody knew it. The children seemed rather proud of the circumstance that Dad could afford to be a drunkard. He had nine sons, worked them hard in the sweet potato fields, made lots of money, and got rip-roaring drunk every time he made a big sale in town. He had high-spirited horses that looked beautiful in a runaway. There was no more dramatic scene to be had in all the countryside than Joe Stooger trying to drive his big grays into a Santa Fe locomotive, head-on, when he decided to take a short-cut home by way of the railroad track, after selling two thousand dollars' worth of sweet potatoes for cash in town.

The horses always got the better of the argument. They simply would not run into the front end of a Santa Fe locomotive in motion. They left the track, went homeward in insane fright, scattering the old man, his two thousand dollars, and parts of the wagon, along a route five or six miles in length.

Next day, the Stooger runaway was the talk of the neighborhood and of the school.

"Yes, Father got hurt. He was too drunk and tried to drive home on the railroad track. We got most of the money, though. Everybody along the way was mighty honest."

So said the Stooger children. In our case, it must never be admitted

that Himself took a drink. Well, a little wine; the neighbors knew about that. But that he went haywire and scared the family half to death was our own affair. It must never be mentioned.

"Do you think he's gone crazy?" I asked Mother.

"Maybe so. Or maybe he's just mean. He likes to scare us, but he's afraid to carry on this way when John is at home. Just pray. They will be coming home soon. I hope Father Tihen doesn't preach a long sermon."

The Old Man occasionally went outdoors and took a little snooze, and maybe a little more from the barrel. Then he would be back, overturning the furniture, roaring, shouting about the half a pound of tay, and winding up on the old refrain, "She conquered there!"

Once he opened the stairway door and took two steps up. Then I thought our time had come. I made the Sign of the Cross and said the last prayer of the dying: "Jesus, Mary and Joseph; into thy hands I commend my spirit."

"That's me fate!" he shouted. "To be guverrened by a wooman! Poor auld Flurry, guverrened by a wooman!"

Down he went again, roaring, smashing things, crying. He had found a new phrase that sounded good to him. After each tramp to the pantry and back, he yelled, "Guverrened by a wooman!"

The east was light when Big Flurry made his final apparent attempt to get upstairs. He managed four or five steps and fell back with a tremendous clatter, shouting, "Wooman! I'm going back to Ireland! Get me a tousand dollars, Wooman, so I can go back where they don't dhress up like archbishops to dance a waltz! A tousand dollars, I say!"

Next thing I knew, he was staggering down toward the haystacks, shouting back an occasional defiance, and a threat to go back to Ireland and scratch a beggar's arse in peace.

*"These look rough," I said, half aloud, one Sunday morning, as we were starting for church.*

*I was talking about my shoes. They were heavy-soled plow shoes, black, with big eyelets, a size too big. I had spent a sleepy Saturday night in heroic efforts to clean and oil them.*

*These shoes were not supposed to be shined. For practical purposes, they were treated to neatsfoot oil, rubbed in with much muscular effort. That helped to make them last, and to keep out water.*

*Van hooted and John grinned malevolently when they heard me say, "These look rough." Van teased me about it for months thereafter. He asked me if I thought I rated vici kid, like John.*

*What I was really thinking about was the smell of the shoes. In cleaning them, I had not been able to get away from the odor of the pig pen. Pig manure is pungent and assertive. I had scraped and rubbed and oiled, but I could still smell the pig manure.*

*I dreaded to meet the nice girls in immaculate starched white dresses at church. I was sure that they could smell the pig manure. They would laugh at me. Not openly, perhaps, but surely they would go home and say, "I don't care for Charlie Driscoll because his shoes have such a funny smell."*

*I kept my feet back under the pew as much as possible. The lovely girls in white passed up the aisle, and I thought I saw queer smiles on their faces. "O God," I prayed, "don't let them smell the pig manure!"*



THERE came an interlude of comparative prosperity and good feeling. Big Flurry was feeding his biggest herds of cattle and hogs. There was a winter of heavy work with the feeding, but all the animals came through in good shape, without disease or loss of weight on account of the weather.

Marketing time came when many bills were piled up. Two loads of hogs paid Gus Sauer and Fred Ross and Pat Gould and McGowan, as well as the grocer and the patient Dr. Fordyce. Pew rent and taxes were provided for.

Then came the big drive. The fat steers were driven by five horsemen, under command of Big Flurry, gracefully seated upon Prince, to the stockyards, north of Wichita. It was a drive of nearly ten miles, and the day was warm, so that some poundage was lost on the way. There was a foolish custom of salting and docking. The farmer was supposed to keep his animals thirsty and feed them all the salt they would eat before starting for the stockyards. There the cattle, mad with thirst, were turned in where they could get all the salt and water they wanted before weighing.

This wasn't chicanery. Everybody knew about it, and the stockyards provided salt and water free. But when the cattle went on the scales they were docked so many pounds each for salt and water. That is, the buyer, before bidding on the cattle, deducted from their weight all the weight of the water, plus a little for safety margin.

The drive had started before daylight. Dad came home late in the evening. Mother had a hot supper waiting for him. He told of the day's adventures, how many times the cattle had broken away and got into lawns, flower beds and fields on the way.

Big Flurry was in a good humor, despite the day's aggravating labors. Mother sat by the dining-room stove and listened.

After supper, the Old Man was busy in the kitchen for a while. He came into the dining room, where we were all sitting, stepped up in front of Mother with his broad-brimmed black hat in both his hands, and dumped the hat's contents into her lap.

"Well, there you are, Old Wooman!" he said, with a broad smile.

Mother was obviously pleased. The hat was filled with gold, silver and banknotes. The commission men paid off in cash, and with much gold mixed with the other forms of money.

"This is fine, thanks be to God," said Mother. "Now, please God, the children can have clothes, and we can get some things for the house. Let's see."

She counted the money—considerably over a thousand dollars! Then she began calculating, with the aid of one of the children.

"I owe the Golden Eagle so much, Mr. Warp so much, and Mrs. Palmer so much. . . ."

Still, there was much money left. Well, the most urgent things first. Shoes for the boys, everyday dresses, wallpaper. It had been a long time since there had been any money in the house.

Big Flurry listened, nodded his head, seemed to agree with everything.

"Well, thanks be to God," he said, "we have plenty of money for everything we need. 'Twas many's a tug it took to get the cattle and hogs from nowhere to the packinghouse. Now we can have a little pace while we get ready for the spring planting."

As if God had not done enough for us, a great fire destroyed the big department store of George Innes & Co., and a monumental fire sale was advertised. Now our needs could be supplied at a fraction of normal prices.

Fire-and-water-damaged goods were salvaged and moved to a four-story factory building on South Market street. Elaborate preparations were made for the greatest fire sale in history. The regular sales force of the store was quadrupled, goods were cleaned, departments were organized in the vast open floors of the factory, and hundreds of signs, directing the customers, posted. The sale was not opened until the staff and goods were ready.

Mother took me along on the first day of the sale, to help her with any small packages that she might have to carry.

We spent the day there, with half an hour out for lunch and rest. The crowds were tremendous. It looked as though all the wares would be sold out before night. But as a department was depleted, it was miraculously replenished. Only a small portion of the goods showed damage by fire or water.

Mother bought bolts of linen for sheets, bolts of cotton goods for dresses and quilt covers, bolts of cotton flannel for underclothes, oilcloth for kitchen and pantry, tablecloths, napkins, goods for making shirts for the men, spools of thread by the dozen.

As we drove home that night, Mother figured up her expenditures and what she had got. She had spent \$75, more than at any one time in the previous history of her life. She was a little nervous about it. She would talk to Himself before spending any more money.

Himself was jubilant. He delighted in seeing the goods come in, while realizing that it had been bought at such a bargain. He suggested that some of the linoleum advertised as only slightly damaged might be a good investment for the kitchen floor.

Next day we returned to the sale and bought heavy linoleum, exactly enough to cover the enormous kitchen floor, plus an extra piece to be laid in front of the kitchen stove, where the most wear took place. This floor covering was undamaged, except for smoke smudges on the edges.

Big Flurry took charge of laying the linoleum himself, giving the slivery kitchen floor a thick coat of white lead before laying the wide strips and tacking them down. Everything came out exactly right.

Now, Mother rejoiced, there would be no more scrubbing, on hands and knees, of that awful floor, which had put so many thousands of slivers into her hands through the years. Just a gentle wiping with a damp cloth, which cost no trouble at all. She was wet-eyed in her appreciation of this easing of her burdens.

Next day, the Old Man said, "Ellen, you'm best put on your bib and tucker and come with me to Houck's Hardware store. Faith, Houck was telling me they have a fine kitchen range there that won't dhrop ashes on your cakes. Maybe we could buy it while we're rich, ourself."

So they went to Houck's, and next day Dad brought home in the farm wagon a shiny Quick-Meal range.

It was of steel, with nickel trimmings. Six lids, a fine, big reservoir that would actually heat the water, and a shelf for keeping things warm.

Life on the farm assumed new refinement. The new range would take sticks of wood sixteen inches long. Keeping the fire going was no trouble at all. There was always water in the reservoir, hot enough for washing dishes if only a kettleful of boiling water was added. The younger boys were now big enough to haul the water for the reservoir and other household needs, and keep the woodbox filled.

Carrying in wood and water was a chore that never lessened. One of the packing boxes that had come from Aunt Fannie was installed as the greater woodbox, beside the range, against the east wall of the kitchen.

Mother's disciplinary theory was altogether out of harmony with modern methods. She assigned the tasks of filling woodbox and reservoir as punishment. In order to keep the supply of fuel and water at normal, there had to be a long category of offenses. Infractions of discipline were almost hourly occurrences, and if the supply of wood or water ran low, previous infractions were resurrected as justification for the order: "Go out and fill up the woodbox," or "You may fill up the reservoir, right to the brim."

We are all judged by our children. Now that I have reached an age roughly corresponding to that of my mother in the era of which I am writing, I judge her disciplinary system to have been bad. We boys should have kept the woodbox and reservoir filled as a regular assignment of duty, but not as punishment. Work became for us a horror, something to avoid if possible, merely because work was doled out to us as punishment. In my opinion, work should be made a joy for children, because by work they must learn to live.

In years of living, I have learned to regard work as a great blessing. The harder I work, the more I enjoy life. I have quit jobs where the work was too easy, to take harder jobs at less pay, because

I have learned to get joy out of hard work, to measure time and life by that which is produced by hard work.

On the farm, I grew up dreaming about a life in which I might make enough money to enable me to loaf, rest, and be idle. The most unhappy men I have met in New York, California and Florida were reared with that same goal in view, and have achieved it. Rich enough to ignore office hours and set tasks, they have spent their spare time getting divorces, quarreling with their wives, children, sweethearts and associates.

An important factor in our social picture is the teaching that God cursed Adam with the necessity for earning his bread in the sweat of his brow, and that all of us have inherited that curse. I am no authority on Christian doctrine, but I would be willing to bet a summer day's labor in the harvest field that God was in a particularly benevolent mood toward Adam when He gave to him the privilege of earning his bread by working, rather than sitting on the beach and fighting with his wife.

So we boys fought over whose turn it was to fill the woodbox or reservoir, but we would have been fighting anyway. It didn't take an adult man long to fill the woodbox. He could carry enough sticks in two armfuls to make the box level full. But we boys could carry only six or eight sticks to an armful, so it seemed a slow operation.

The Aunt Fannie box had the word FRAGILE stenciled across the side that faced into the kitchen.

We boys believed this to be the name of some merchant in Erie. We alluded to the hated woodbox as "Old Fray-Guile" and wished the Erie merchant the worst possible luck.

A new carpet for the dining room came out of the fire sale, and the straw matting that had been used there was transferred to the small bedroom, off the kitchen.

The house was taking on a more prosperous appearance, and Mother revived her hopes of a cistern.

*Van and I reached an agreement. We would both forswear social life, and devote our energies to getting education.*

*We decided that no great sacrifice was involved, since we saw no opportunity for any social life that appealed to us. We had not learned to dance, sing, play any instrument, or even hum a tune. We were not much enamored of the social activities of our older sisters and brother. We would rather read late at night than walk through quadrilles, with Bill Calloway calling off the figures.*

*Then, there was that self-consciousness in the presence of girls, which we shared. I attributed it to the constant fear that the girls might smell the pig manure on my shoes, while Van attributed his shyness to his stuttering. A good psychiatrist might have guessed some other motive or causes, but we were not worried about it.*

*Mother did not approve of our mingling socially with girls of the neighborhood, anyway. Away back in her mind, she had some sort of vague hope that we might achieve a way of life that would be better than slavery to the soil and the hogs. I can't see how she nourished such a hope, in view of our total lack of means to lift ourselves out of the slough in which we waded. But she did not give up hope. Prayer, she said, could accomplish anything.*

*As to this, I could not but assent. Van had said a lot of prayers about his eyes, and, sure enough, they were getting better. Of course, he had used cold tea on his eyes, too, and I wasn't sure whether that hadn't had something to do with the improvement.*

BIG FLURRY's family was growing up; no doubt about that. John had become J. E., or The Lawyer, or, a little later, The Professor, to his dad. Seldom did the Old Man speak to him or of him as Jan, any more.

After the Damn Masquerade, I was driving the horses for the Old Man in the cornfield, while he husked corn on a bitter winter day. There was the customary silence, broken by a few curses hurled at the horses from time to time.

"A-a-a, Charlie bye, what kind of a dhress was this that The Lawyer had on at the party, I don't know?"

O terrible! Himself had looked through a window, or had seen J. E. on the back porch, during the ball! One of the most sacred duties of the year was to keep from Dad any inkling of John's blossoming out in masquerade costume. What was I to say?

"Why, he was dressed like George Washington," I said, weakly.

"Jarge Washington, is it? Faith, 'tis himself must have had a hard time of it at Valley Forge, with all that velvet on! No wondher the English kept him with his arse to the guns for four years and more, until the French came over and saved him. Arrugh, Bishop Hennessy himself couldn't be wearing more lace, and him saying Mass out loud for a dead bartender!

"Ah then, J. E. is a great man, I doubt. No wondher he can't put a harness on a harse, when he can be Jarge Washington in plush the night!

"Where did he get all this finery, I don't know?"

"Oh, Mother rented the suit from Mrs. Palmer for a dollar and a half! They've sent it back already, and somebody else will wear it at another dance."

I was enjoying the Old Man's comments, but I had to stick close to a wavering line of truth, revelation and concealment.

"So! So! 'Tis a dancing suit The Lawyer wears to dance in! A dancing suit, God Almighty, do you hear?"

He kept on tossing ears of corn into the wagon, only occasionally turning his face to the sky to address his surprised complaints directly to the Throne of Grace.

"A jumping suit he'll be having next! A jumping suit, a running suit, a farting suit, ourself! Where is The Lawyer now, I don't know? Making rings on the clane white paper, allay, I suppose. He must have the sleeves of his shirts sawed off, so that his wondherful muscles can make rings on the paper, as big around as the turd of a ribbit!"

It irked the Old Man that John required Mother to cut off the right sleeve of all his underclothes, and the right sleeve of every shirt. The outer shirt sleeve was fitted with buttons and button-holes near the shoulder, so that John could unbutton the sleeve when he wanted to practice making ovals.

John remained silent in the presence of the Old Man, as, in fact, nearly everybody did. But it was clear that John was not intended for this kind of life. He gave less and less time to farm work, and spent more and more time with his friends in that distant world, The City.

We bought two copies of the *Sunday Eagle* the day it carried the announcement that Prof. E. H. Robbins was about to start a new institution, the Wichita Commercial College, in the Scheetz Building, at the corner of Market street and Douglas avenue, only a block from the *Eagle* office itself. There was a picture of be-whiskered Robbins, and one of the head of his prospective penmanship department, Prof. J. E. Driscoll, who had won the international prize for the best business penmanship.

Prof. Driscoll, it was announced, would also teach bookkeeping, actual business practice, commercial law, and other subjects.

Mother tried to impress Big Flurry with the importance of this big news by showing him the paper, with John's picture in it. The Old Man merely remarked that he had to feed the hogs and



could find no time for looking at pretty pictures. Out he went, and that was the last time anybody tried to impress him with the published exploits of his exemplary son.

Privately, we learned that Prof. Robbins would not pay John any salary, for the present. He would have to be supported in his new position from home. In view of the fact that Himself did not take kindly to John's career, most of the money would have to come out of butter, eggs, and blackberries. Well, God would provide. John had to have Dunlap hats at five dollars each, good neckties, tailor-made suits, and shirts ordered from a drummer. These items were essential to his appearance and way of life.

John went to work as a professor. He took a room in a private house owned by some people named York, on North Topeka avenue. It was not an expensive room. John seemed neither to resent its bareness nor to take pride in his aloofness from the farm and its hardships. He accepted scarce dollar bills from Mother at parting, on Sunday evenings, when I would drive him to town, perhaps to vespers, and drive back alone. During the trip townward, John sometimes drove. He permitted the lines to lie slack on the dashboard, except when he tugged at them impatiently, to indicate more speed to the horse. Rarely was there a word spoken. John sucked air through his teeth on the right side, as a means of breaking the monotony of the long drive. Sometimes he would say, after clearing his throat, "Now, you fellows had better be good to Mother. The Old Man is causing her a lot of worry. I may have to run him off the farm. But you fellows be good to Mother, so that she won't worry too much."

Indeed, the Old Man was getting to be a major problem, if he hadn't been one before. He did a great deal of what was technically called raising hell.

Raising hell consisted largely of going about the premises bawling maledictions upon his family, distant relatives, and, particularly, cursing the day he was born. Together with this, there was a growing tendency to bring up the matter of the half a pound of tea, and vaguely outlined incidents that had happened since the wedding day.

To all of the children, the causes of the marital unhappiness were mysterious, inexplicable. They seemed to go back to years before any of us was born.

Mother was not voiceless during the developing storm. As the older children began to mature into individuals, with their own careers before them, Mother began to be more dependent, more helpless, less self-reliant. She was afraid of Himself. She depended upon the prestige and resourcefulness of John, and the self-reliant dignity of Marie and Margaret, to protect her in a futile and seemingly senseless battle with Himself. The sky grew steadily darker for all of us, and we were in no wise comforted by the circumstance that we had not the slightest idea what the trouble was all about. We only knew that we were on Mother's side.

During this long chapter of storm, which, in retrospect, seems to have lasted for a period of at least a century, we saw our sensitive, delicate mother being worn down, driven through stage after stage of nervous exhaustion, and the Old Man, timeless, ageless, strong as Gibraltar, wild and unpredictable as a figure in a dream, roaring up and down our small world, speaking a language we did not understand, and yet, pathetically enough, seeming to struggle always for understanding. The Old Man had given up hope of ever making his point of view understood by anybody. And, as his consternation grew upon him with the realization that he would always be an alien, he began to seek a way out, like a rat in a trap.

He must go back to Ireland!

This notion began to be expressed whenever any problem presented itself. Well, he was not capable of keeping accounts, of proving to Father Kelly that he had paid his pew rent, of proving to the government that he had paid his taxes. He did not belong in such a world. He should be back in Ireland, in a thatched shack, catching fish or sailing strong ships in stormy seas. Who gave a God-damn whether a jib-boom was fore or aft, in this prairie country? Which of his children could respect his ability to reef a mainsail in a sleet storm? Yet, he seemed to try to say, these are the items I have to offer, and there are no takers. Let me go back where

these things are current coin. I will gladly give up whatever I have got together here in America, and take shelter in the land of my boyhood.

It may have been a little late for this kind of thinking. After all, here was a large family, here were obligations. Out on the weedy hill east of town lay two of his children, awaiting that distant reunion that the priests talked about. Here was a fine bottom farm, and here were sons and daughters, seemingly drifting into a strange world where everybody could read and write and cipher. Was nothing left of Flurry Driscoll's world?

I sensed the overwhelming feeling of frustration as I went afiel with the Old Man, tramping down the hay, guiding the horses, sitting on the beam of the plow while breaking prairie sod, learning how to fell a tree without danger of being crushed under it. There was the inherent drive to work, to struggle with the elements, to come out alive, regardless of wind, weather, pests and lightning. But there was the feeling, too, that all was useless, all purposeless. If there was victory, whose victory?

Margaret was reaching out for her place in the world. Indeed, she had always reached for it. She did not feel the overwhelming obligation to home and mother that Marie felt. As the second daughter now living, she could afford always to give a little more attention to her own needs and her own future, since Marie was so whole-heartedly devoted to the interest of Mother and the home.

There was little enough reading matter in the house while the girls were growing up, so it is not to be wondered at that Marie and Margaret began reading novels at the same time. After Marie had spent a week end with her friend, Nell Fahey, in town, she brought home a novel that Nell had been reading and recommended highly. It was a story of love and such things, with some lurid passages that would make almost any girl blush. It was called "East Lynne."

That very same week, one of our hired men, having been fired for some minor infraction of discipline, had gone away, leaving in his bedroom a paper-covered novel entitled "Lena Rivers."

Both girls knew that Mother would not approve of their reading

novels. There had been enough discussion through the years to establish the fact that a novel was a love story, often involving improper and even sinful incidents.

Nevertheless, both girls took the novels to their room, hid them in their closet, and read them whenever they had time to spare. They promised to trade novels, so that both would have both stories, and they could discuss the romances in secret.

Mother easily discovered the crime. She burst in upon the girls when the two were sitting on their bed, late on a winter Sunday, reading their novels. There was a severe lecture, protests on the part of the girls, and decisive action. Mother confiscated both novels and hid them away. She forbade the girls to read such books.

For the first and only time in her life, Marie was rebellious in spirit against her mother. Many years later she told me that at that moment she was more angry with her mother than any good girl ever should be. As for Margaret, she announced that, one way or another, she would read all the novels in the world.

Because the girls put up a united front, the case was referred to John. He skimmed through "East Lynne," found immoral matter in it, and decided that the only safe way was to take the case to Father Tihen. On the following Sunday, John called at the rectory after Mass, and had a long talk with the good father.

The verdict was in favor of the girls. Father Tihen said that there was no sin involved in reading a novel. Love itself was in no way sinful. Indeed, he had read many novels himself, and was compelled to read them in college. As for these particular novels, he had not read them, but he considered it perfectly safe for well-reared girls to read all the popular novels. He thought they should do it, in fact.

It was a major triumph for the girls. The hidden novels were restored, and Mother lost face as a proctor of morals.

Mother did not take so violent a stand when the next big question of morals arose. The controversy hinged upon whether a deck of playing cards should be brought into the house. There was a card game called euchre that was sweeping the country. Even the *Saturday Evening Post* talked about it, and seemed to see no in-

herent wrong in it. That was all very well in an academic way, but when it touched one's own household, action was indicated.

Townie friends played cards. They wanted to play euchre next time they came to the farm.

Mother decreed that no deck of cards should come into the house without the full knowledge and consent of Father Tihen. She had learned at her home that the devil was in every deck of cards. Magic was done with these instruments, black magic of hell.

There were no recriminations this time. The girls felt confident of Father Tihen's verdict.

The pastor smilingly offered to sit in on a game some day, when the girls had learned euchre. He loved it, and the priests often whiled away a dull evening with it. They couldn't imagine getting through the year without a deck of cards, though they abstained from playing during Lent, as a voluntary sacrifice.

That ended the ban on cards. However, it so fell out that no member of the family ever took the slightest interest in card games. The one deck that John bought was never used.

Margaret was bright in school. She got along well with every teacher. She was so thirsty for knowledge that no teacher could refuse to give her extra instruction, outside of regular school hours. She stayed after school, either by herself or with her friend, Mabel Owens, to take algebra, European history, and other high school subjects. The teachers got no pay for this extra teaching. They did the work as one might stay overtime to feed starving children. They could not bear to see such a hungry mind unfed.

While she was spending this overtime in school, Margaret was, naturally enough, not helping at home. But Marie was willing and anxious to do the extra work for her bright and studious sister. Margaret was going to be a schoolteacher. All right, laugh as you will, she'll be a schoolteacher, and just you wait and see.

So, of course, she became a schoolteacher. She went to Teachers' Institute every summer, at the Lewis Academy, in Wichita, listening to lectures, studying educational theories, and taking examinations. When she was seventeen she had her teacher's certificate, with high

honors. Meantime, she had had parts of two terms at the high school maintained by the Sisters of Charity, Blessed Virgin Mary, in connection with the grade school of the parish of St. Aloysius.

It wasn't much of a high school, as such institutions are rated today. But it was just the place for a farm girl whose time and money were strictly limited, and whose ambition was not limited. It cost Mother a dollar a month for tuition. Sometimes Mother didn't have the dollar. That made no difference. The sisters would be glad to have the dollar whenever it was available.

There was a selfless nun called Sister Mary Ida, to whom I owe much, though I do not remember ever having seen her. She was one of Margaret's teachers, and was so impressed by the pupil's thirst for knowledge that she lent her many books to bring home. There was a whole set of the writings of Edward Bulwer-Lytton and a set of Washington Irving.

Margaret allowed me to read these borrowed books at night while she was busy with her homework. I read every word of them.

But more important than any other book lent by the good sister was a thin volume called "Lectures on English Literature," by Maurice Francis Egan. Those lectures enabled me to discriminate between trash and good reading matter, thus saving me much time in my early reading. I read and re-read the witty, sparkling lectures, and longed for more of them. Egan lived a long and useful life, served his country as Minister to Denmark during trying times, and left after him a grand biography, "Recollections of a Happy Life." But his greatest contribution, in all probability, was his setting of many young people on the right track in their reading habits.

Margaret had to borrow her mother's black silk skirt when she set out to look for a school to teach, immediately after she passed her examinations and received her teacher's certificate, third grade. The grade merely meant that this was her first year of teaching. But no school board was going to hire a third grade teacher if it could get a second-grader for the same price. Besides, this girl looked very young, despite that long black skirt.

She landed a contract to teach in a pinkish one-room schoolhouse called Gypsum Center, in the uplands, where corn and wheat grew

short and boys and girls grew tall. It was not far from the neighborhood in which the family had lived before I was born. The community was desperately poor, but it paid Margaret \$35 a month for two school terms.

Out of her first paycheck the new teacher bought herself some badly needed clothes. She didn't ask Marie or Mother to go along on her shopping expedition. She had her own ideas about what she wanted to wear. Mother and Marie privately looked with consternation upon the outfits Margaret provided for herself. They always shopped together and agreed in matters of taste. Margaret was *sui generis* in the matter of taste, as in other matters.

Margaret boarded with a family named Morrison, in a bleak-looking, unpainted old farmhouse on a hill, a quarter-mile walk across the pasture from the little schoolhouse. Friday afternoon, either Van or I stayed out of school and drove the sixteen or eighteen miles over the hills to pick up Margaret and bring her home for the week end. Sunday afternoon we drove her back, and, returning, arrived very late at home.

Since becoming a teacher and teaching current events classes, Margaret had become much interested in national affairs, politics, and the progress of science. At the supper table, on one of her week ends at home, she expressed a mild opinion about what Congress ought to do next week.

Big Flurry raised his head momentarily out of his saucer of coffee and shouted: "Enough from you, Old Wooman!" The dishes rattled as he brought his fist down on the table to emphasize his command.

Margaret left the table at once. In the kitchen, she said to Mother, "Well, I'd like to know if he thinks he can keep all of us from having opinions all our lives! I'm making my own living, and I'm no child, to be shouted down every time I open my mouth."

Mother appreciated the point of view, but was amused at the Old Man's nerve in silencing this independent daughter. He had been regulating all of us at the table all our lives, merely by hitting the table with his fist and shouting "Silence!"

Once when Van and I were discussing our cats and scrapbooks in

the dining room, disturbing no one, the Old Man, from his throne beside the kitchen stove, roared: "I'm here! I'm here! I'm here!" The intimation seemed to be that we should keep our voices to a whisper level out of respect for The Presence.

Now it had got to a point where the family would be getting out of hand, expressing opinions about Congress aloud, right before Himself, if strong measures were not taken. Hence the command of silence to the schoolteacher.

Only a short time before this, the Old Man had come upon Van and me while we were engaged in an argument about Free Silver. We had got to the stage where one had called the other a liar, and mild blows were being exchanged.

Himself, coming up the hill, hurled the galvanized iron bucket he happened to be carrying, from a distance of thirty feet. His aim, as usual, was bad. The bucket went clattering to the ground ahead of us, after having passed well over our heads. We started to run, as Big Flurry roared after us, "That Jazus may part ye soon—and that's a father's wish to ye!"

We paid no attention to this solemn malediction, for the Old Man was always tossing out high-sounding curses, or making exaggerated statements about the seriousness of some trifling infraction of discipline.

I was merely pretending to be General Sheridan, twenty miles away, and was galloping along, barefooted, clapping hands to thighs in imitation of the horse's hoofbeats, when I absent-mindedly galloped past Big Flurry in the barnyard. He lunged for me, and I hastened my gallop to avoid him. He started after me, picking up a stick of stovewood on the way. I glanced around in time to avoid the missile as he flung it after me, underhand style.

When I saw I was still being pursued, I made for a sycamore tree, and up I went, like a cat. As I peered down, the Old Man was hurling a clod up at me, crying, "Charlie-bye, you'll break me heart!" I couldn't see then, nor have I been able to figure out since, how my harmless soldier-playing could break the Old Man's heart. But there was a strong feeling that I was leading a dissolute life, playing games instead of making myself useful.



Van did not fancy the idea of staying out of school and missing the Friday afternoon entertainments. I didn't mind, because the long drive into the strange country beyond the river was a change, a sort of weekly adventure. One sometimes met people, if only when Margaret stopped in at the home of a member of the school board, once a month, to get her pay check. It was interesting to observe how other folk lived, and especially to realize that there were many families in the hill country that were much poorer than ours.

My most memorable drive over the hills was on Sunday afternoon and evening, February 12, 1899. It is easy to verify that date, for it is still celebrated in the records of the Weather Bureau as the coldest day in the history of Wichita. Official reading was 22 degrees below zero, Fahrenheit. A stiff wind blew from the north bringing hard snow.

It was a gloomy day; that I know. Himself had been raising hell during the preceding week. Mother was apprehensive, nervous, lonely in the departure of John and Margaret for another week. John had a job in town. We had to drive him to the southernmost reach of sidewalk, perhaps a mile and a half out of our way.

The power was furnished by Old Bones, for we still had no driving horse on the premises. The vehicle was Margaret's new red road-wagon, smart in appearance, but devoid of any cover or protection from the weather. There was no conversation as we drove against the north wind, through drifting snow. We were wrapped in several heavy quilts. The buffalo robe had been worn out. We could have used it that day.

As we neared the stretch of sidewalk on which John could walk to the street car, we passed the home of old Captain Huntzburger, long a friend of the family. He was a lanky, grizzled old fellow who had been captain of a Lake Erie sailing ship, with Erie as his home port. It was natural that he and my parents should have much in common out on the prairies, so he and his wife and adopted daughter were occasional visitors at our farm. The Captain liked to talk of storms and bitter weather on the lakes. He gloried in his exploits in bringing his ship through howling winds and ice.

They were burying the Captain today, and as tough a job of

navigation it was for the undertaker as any the old man had ever managed on the lake. There was the black hearse and team of heavily blanketed black horses, all turned white with snow, tied outside the house. There were a few hacks whose drivers had deserted them to take shelter in the kitchen. The snow was thickening now. We lost sight of the hearse as it was backed up to the front door to receive the old Captain for his last stormy voyage.

This sight didn't do much to cheer us up. John told us goodbye expressionlessly as he adjusted his earmuffs and bent into the storm, afoot.

The sun might have been anywhere or nowhere by the time we got back on our road to Gypsum Center. The earth was a gray-white waste, with no traffic moving. We didn't have to look out for trains when crossing the railroad track. It was obvious that no locomotive could plow through this weather.

Margaret and I took turns driving. She was much more warmly dressed than I, and wore warm gloves. I had on a pair of corn-huskers' mittens that were far too big for me. My fingers soon turned numb and icy, after which time they ceased to hurt very much.

Several times we thought Old Bones was going to give up the struggle. As we traversed the hills of the California Section, she stopped in each valley, ate a little snow, and tried to lie down. The hill ahead looked too much for her. In many places the drifted snow was up to the high bed of our vehicle. We frequently had to go away off the road in order to avoid high drifts. We permitted Bones to rest a little while in the valleys, and then whipped her up the next hill. Would we make it? Margaret said we could only do our best. She was not one to give up easily. The fact that we met nobody in miles and miles of driving indicated to us that the whole countryside recognized this as a major storm, though we had no means of knowing what the temperature was.

It was dark when we drove into the Morrison back yard. Reese, the tall, friendly son of the family came running out to take our horse. We stumbled into the cordial warmth of the farmhouse kitchen. White-whiskered Old Man Morrison and his gentle wife

bade us welcome, and set steaming coffee before us. The talk was of the livestock that was perishing of the cold over the hills.

Some time was spent thawing me out after it was casually noted that my face, hands, ears and feet were frozen white. The Morrisons would not permit me to start out for home that night, and, indeed, they would have been less than human if they had, for the horse and I surely would have perished on the way.

I slept with Reese in a cozy but unheated bedroom upstairs. When I undressed, Reese noted with a mixture of horror and surprise that I wore no underclothes.

"Why, golly's sakes alive, boy, don't you wear underclothes this kind of weather?" asked Reese.

I was ashamed to say that I hadn't any to wear. However, I must have sounded idiotic when I replied, "Well, it was so warm when we started out that I just forgot to put 'em on."

At this, Reese let out a whoop of laughter, and we crawled into bed, I in one of his cotton-flannel nightshirts.

*Van and I shared the family opinion that John was one of the world's finest young men. We could not do otherwise and continue to live in our environment.*

*But we had our own private reservations. We had learned that John often mispronounced words. We would make notes of these words and look them up in the big Unabridged dictionary, at school. We would never dare to correct John, or to mention the fact that we had found him in error. That would be like telling the Pope that he was wearing the wrong vestments at Easter.*

*We would find occasion, however, to use the words we had looked up, and to pronounce them correctly. This was done in a stealthy manner, and without apparent evil intent. It never won any pats on the back for either of us.*

*We resented John's tyranny over us, but only as the farmer resents thistles in the potato patch. It was all for the best, we were sure. Van would accept edicts and punishments from John that he would not tolerate from the Old Man. After all, John had Mother's authority behind him, and, so far as we could ascertain, God's authority, too.*

*We did not hope to grow up to be men like John. Neither did we hope to resemble God. But, under God and Mother and John, we hoped to achieve a kind of life which, we were sure, only God understood.*

AFTER a season or two of teaching at Wichita Commercial College in winter and doing a limited amount of work on the farm in summer, John was getting a small salary. It was not enough to pay his expenses, however, and Mother still had to help out. John showed a growing distaste for ordinary farm labor, although he was willing to go out into the berry patches with Mother and help garner crates of blackberries, especially when there was some definite objective in view, such as a new tailor-made suit for John or wallpaper for the dining room.

Mother and Marie had been accustomed to doing the wallpapering, which included papering the ceilings. Mother was an expert at this kind of work, but as she grew older and less steady of nerve, the papering of the ceilings was particularly arduous. John now volunteered to help with this work. It was far less distasteful to him than working in the fields with his father or under his father's orders.

A certain amount of time had to be spent by John every week at the job of practicing the muscular movement. He preferred to do this work on the dining-room table in the afternoons, since there was trouble in the evening about various members of the large family clustering around the coal-oil lamp on the table to read or work. Somebody was likely to jar the table, thus throwing John off his form in making ovals. If somebody actually leaned on the table while reading his book, John was likely to sigh profoundly, put away his writing materials, and go up to bed.

There came an announcement destined to affect the course of history in our family. Professor Robbins had decided to establish a commercial college in the growing town of Oklahoma City, in the new State of Oklahoma. He would send J. E. down there, at

an increase of several dollars a month, as head of a department. There was no question about accepting. In the first place, the increase would be almost sufficient to meet John's living expenses, and in the second place, Professor Robbins was insistent. Here, he said, was a great opportunity in a new country for an ambitious young man. He added, parenthetically, that he had no use for a young man who was not ambitious. After the new college began to make money, J. E.'s salary would be raised, undoubtedly in a substantial manner. "If I make it, you'll make it, John," said Robbins.

That summer, John devoted all his time to improving his penmanship, helping Mother with various tasks, and doing some summer work for Professor Robbins in Wichita. We were all somewhat stunned, and at the same time affected with a feeling of distinction, because the flower of the family was going into foreign parts to carry the beacon of civilization to the Indians.

We measured on the geography maps and found that Oklahoma City was about 165 miles from Wichita in a straight line. When Mother cried at the prospect of having her favorite son so far away, I comforted her by reminding her that we lived about six miles south of the Santa Fe depot in Wichita, thereby cutting the distance to an inconsiderable stretch of approximately 159 miles. Besides, our measuring had been crude, and the maps might be wrong. I had read somewhere that the Mercator projection, used in all school maps, was a distorted compromise in cartography. It exaggerated many lines.

Might it not be that the line between Oklahoma City and Wichita has been distorted on the map, making the new Indian town appear to be much farther away than it actually was?

Mother appreciated these efforts at consolation, but she mourned over the inevitable march of events which was to separate her from her first-born son, her hero, in whom her faith reposed.

There was one trunk in the house. It was the one Mother had brought west with her on both of her trips from Erie to Kansas. It was never a very stout trunk, and its radically arched lid was now cracked. But John was an expert at the art of roping trunks. He

had seen Big Flurry rope one trunk, sailor fashion, in his youth, and had caught the trick immediately. He had roped Aunt Fannie's trunks when she traveled from Wichita to Erie. No sensible person shipped a trunk in those days without roping. John was sure that our family trunk would stand the trip to Oklahoma City, with a good job of roping.

There was a valise in which he could carry his most immediate needs. Mother washed and ironed all the washable clothes, and she and John worked together in packing the trunk. Small as that receptacle was, it was found that more than half of it would have to be filled with crumpled newspapers, to keep the contents from rattling about. Poor John! It was evident to all the family that he started life in the new frontier community with little of this world's goods.

We had seen pictures of Oklahoma City Commercial College in the newspaper, and in circulars got out by Professor Robbins. The name of the institution, and "E. H. Robbins, Pres.," extended clear across the front of the two-story building.

The street in front of the college was all mud, and a view of the main street, which was sent up by one of the early arrivals on the new school job, was not encouraging. But the town was growing. Robbins confidently predicted that some day the new town would take the capital away from Guthrie and thereafter would grow to stupendous proportions, even rivaling Wichita itself in size and population. As to the Indians, they were all rather tame, and there was no need to fear massacres, or even frequent scalplings.

Nevertheless, Mother was inconsolable, and the rest of the family was mightily concerned about John's new venture. Big Flurry took no interest in the proceedings. When the time came to put John on the train, he volunteered to drive him and Mother and the trunk to town. When Mother, weepingly, had kissed her son goodbye, Big Flurry shook hands with this son who was such a stranger to him, and said, "Well, Jan-bye, God go with you along the road."

The Old Man was silent, as usual, on the way home. Perhaps he was thinking of the morning when his brother John had given

him the solemn Irish blessing as he set out for America—and what?

Van and I had planned to give John a grand farewell salute. His train would have to pass our farm as it went south on its long journey into foreign parts. True, the Santa Fe tracks were so far away, on the other side of the river, that even the sound of the wheels on steel and the toot of the locomotive reached us faintly, or not at all. But we conceived the idea that we could make a conspicuous signal that John, looking out the window of the plunging steel monster, could not help discerning and appreciating.

So we told John: "You be sitting at a window in the train, on the west side. When you've been traveling about fifteen minutes from the Wichita station, you'll be opposite our farm. My land, it don't seem possible you could get so far in fifteen minutes, but that's what Alvie Miller says. We'll be on top of the corncrib, waving a white cloth and yelling at you. We couldn't see you wave back out of the window of the car, maybe, but you can see us, and we'll yell loud."

John said nothing, but turned profoundly to his preparations.

The sun was just peeping above the horizon when Van and I, keeping our watch on top of the corncrib, saw the Oklahoma-bound train, driving insistently southward. That was John's train!

I had got one of Mother's old white nightgowns to wave. I flung it furiously to the morning breeze. Van, who was afraid of high places, and could be induced to climb to the top of the corncrib only in such urgent circumstances as this one historic moment, helped me shout.

"Goodbye, John! Goodbye, John! God bless you, John!" we shouted, at the top of our voices. We had an old leaden police whistle that Dad had brought from Erie. I blew it as loud as I could. As the great, mysterious train, now affected with such a personal interest for all of us, headed resolutely, inexorably, into the south and the mystery of a new country, we shouted together a final, "God bless you, John!"

We climbed down from the top of the corncrib. Van was glad to have the ordeal over with. He had suffered torture which I could not appreciate, because of his fear of high places. We discussed the



state of affairs at the farm, now that John was gone. The first of our family had gone away into the vast world of Indians, Protestants, Oklahomans, and God knew what. Some day we two might be going away.

Van was positive about that. He was going to run away from home as soon as he was confirmed. He could hardly do the job sooner, since he would have to be confirmed anyway. He would much better get it over with at home than to be stopping along the railroad tracks, looking for a bishop to confirm him after he had become a tramp.

The vast reaches of rails that led to worlds unknown held no terror for Van. He had determined to become a tramp, and a lawyer. This latter dignity he would accomplish by stealing John's textbook on commercial law, and studying it by campfires, at night. He would take Shep along to handle any situation that might arise, such as an attack in force by town boys or hostile tramps. Eventually, he would become a lawyer, defending tramps who might be prosecuted for various offenses against the law.

I tried to make fun of Van for his talk about running away from home. I pointed out to him that he would not have to run, because nobody would go after him. He said that when they found that he had taken Shep and the law book, they would run after him, all right. I was impressed. While Van and I fought most of the time we spent together, I realized that I should be lonesome, and should feel the lack of certain worldly-wise inspiration, when Van had run away.

We turned to talk of John and his bold venture into uncharted seas. Had he seen our signal? Reluctantly we admitted that he could not have heard our farewells, probably not even the whistle. The train must have been making a fearful noise, and we had not heard a sound from it. So how could John hear us, above that bedlam?

But he might have seen the waving nightgown. And then he would be able to understand what we were saying.

Could John actually hold his seat and look out the window of a train that sped so fast across the country? Might not the speed and noise make him ill? People probably went mad from traveling

at such speeds, with a puffing and whistling engine pulling them. Could one blame them?

We had had experience with those Santa Fe trains. We had waded the river to see them pass at close range, and had put pennies on the track, to have them mashed flat by the cruel wheels. John was brave, but he undoubtedly realized the risks he was taking, not only with the train, but with the Indians to whom he would be teaching double-entry bookkeeping and the modern business penmanship. Well, God go with him.

John was the only child of Big Flurry who could not write an interesting letter. He was so much concerned with penmanship and proper form of the communication that he never managed to say anything that didn't sound like a bookkeeper's report of conditions.

Marie was selected as correspondent for the family. Her letters to John were written with suggestions from various members of the household. Marie's first letter was re-written several times before it was in finished condition. It began:

Dear John: Well, I suppose you are an all-around Oklahoman now.

We all thought that a clever lead, and figured that John would be surprised and pleased to learn that his sister, whose penmanship was not muscular movement at all, could express herself so clearly on paper. We felt that Marie's convent training, though brief, had given her a certain urbane refinement that anybody would be bound to respect.

The rest of us wrote to John only occasionally, realizing that his work would keep him too busy for answering trivial reports, and also that our lack of ability in business penmanship must be something of a trial to him.

I had been particularly impressed, during the preceding summer, by a lecture I had heard John practicing in the granary when he was supposed to be oiling the harness. I had been playing among the discarded farm machines back of the granary, and tormenting the big spiders by destroying the handsome webs they had built there. Suddenly I heard John "talking to himself."

"There is nothing in this world," the talk began, in ringing, resonant tones, "like expertcy in penmanship."

The phrases were repeated with varied inflections. Up-beat, down-beat, level, oratorical.

Then the talk went on to mention in disparaging terms the relative importance of excellence in dress, accuracy in banking methods, the piling up of material wealth, and the business of winning the ephemeral reward of a woman's affection. Each paragraph ended with the roundly emphasized phrase, "expertcy in penmanship."

I knew then that there was not much hope for the rest of our family. Not one of us had ever learned the muscular movement. Most of us had tried, under John's tutelage. We could not make the resulting script legible. We went back to the old-fashioned finger movement, discouraged and humbled. John assured us that we could never hope to compete with well-trained graduates of modern commercial colleges with such a style of writing. But he never was persistent in teaching us. He lost patience, and the course lagged.

After John went to Oklahoma City, his laundry came and went regularly. It was not extensive. Shirts and collars were of the best quality, but not numerous. Mother loved to do the washing and ironing with her own hands, and always attended to mailing at the proper time.

Ed Blood, the tall, worldly farmer from the Gilman Blood farm, four miles away to the southwest, volunteered to drive the girls to dances that winter. During a portion of that time, Little Fan was in the company, besides Margaret and Marie. When there was a dance in the neighborhood to which our girls were invited, Ed drove over early in the evening in his shining buggy with his black mare, Gyp.

He would unhitch Gyp, put her in our stable, feed her, and then harness and hitch a team of our horses to our carriage. He was very obliging about this business of acting as driver and companion for the two or three girls. But it was gradually becoming evident that he entertained a romantic preference for Marie.

At Christmas, when John came home for a short vacation, it had become a topic of serious conversation at our house that Ed Blood was making regular Friday evening calls on Marie. At first, these appeared to be merely friendly visits to the family, to talk about

the next dance. Lately there was no doubt about it. Ed was coming a-courting.

Now, Ed had a son older than I, and had been divorced. What, if any, other marital experience he had had, was a matter of dispute.

John learned of the situation on his first Friday night at home. He looked alarmed and shocked.

"I'll go in there and run him off the farm," he said. "Everybody knows that a Catholic girl can't marry a divorced man whose wife is still living."

It was decided to take things a little more slowly. A consultation with Father Tihen resulted in an all-around agreement. Marie herself told the suitor, on his next visit, that he could not come again, and why.

It seemed that the whole thing had been cleared up. But such situations are not as simple as that. The first result was that Marie came down with illness which, in these days, we probably would call nervous prostration.

That was bad enough, as the poor girl seemed about to die. But the next development loomed even worse to some of the family. The big fellow was carrying on correspondence with a priest and a bishop in Denver, with the end in view of having his previous marriage declared invalid, so that he might marry within the church. He was also taking instructions in Catholic doctrine.

Big Flurry had declared himself definitely and irrevocably anti-Blood. Not only was he opposed to Ed, to whom he referred as "that damn Moorman," but he was particularly averse to Ed's mother and all her works.

The old lady was an extremely pretentious, loud-talking, fast-chattering, eye-blinking individual who seemed to grate on Big Flurry's nerves far more than her son, who had the virtue, important in the Old Man's estimation, of smoking the best cigars and dividing them freely with his friends. The big Irishman also admitted that Ed was a hard worker, full of good ideas about farming, and an agreeable neighbor to have a pitcher of wine with. There was an occasional truce with Ed; never one with "the Queen of the Peraries."



No parent that I ever heard of was wise enough to rear a child properly. In my own lifetime I have seen a generation turn from the old-fashioned ways of child-rearing and adopt new methods. Freedom schools have been established and disestablished. New method schools, progressive schools, and a dozen other experiments have been tried. Some very odd specimens have resulted.

I can put my finger on many errors my parents made in my upbringing. My children, at my age, can do the same for their parents.

One of the errors I have in mind was Mother's iron-bound rule against fighting at school, or on the road to and from school.

No law was more inflexible than this one. We were not to fight, under any circumstance. Not only would we get a terrific whaling upon our return, victorious or defeated, from any fight, but there would be that series of sanctions enforced against us which would make us outlaws before God and the world.

One effect of this regulation was to make a physical coward out of me for life. I became so accustomed to running from a foe, knowing that his sister might tell Mother if I stayed to fight, that the boys learned that there was no danger incurred in pasting me on the jaw. So they did just that whenever the spirit moved them.

"Take that for being a damned old Kafflick!" they would say. And I took it—generally.

UNCLE JIM came walking up the driveway one autumn day. He was a small, wiry, hard-bitten fellow of some uncertain age that might be called middle. He was dressed in a cheap green suit, which had the virtue of being new. His shirt was clean and neat, and his shoes shined so that they belied Jim's statement that he had walked the five or six miles from wherever he had been staying in Wichita.

Jim's face was flushed, and it was evident that he was suffering from a prodigious hangover, plus an undue allowance of hair of the dog.

Mother was both pleased and alarmed at sight of this brother whom she had not seen for many years. The reunion was cordial, but Mother confided to me that night that she wondered how long Jim intended to stay, and that she feared for his influence upon the Old Man, who already was becoming most intractable.

Jim explained that he was in the West in search of a job. He pronounced the word in a fashion that is difficult to represent in print, but I shall write it jawb. It was a good deal as if you added a b sound to the end of the word jaw. I noticed that Jim used many other odd pronunciations and idioms.

"Yes, Ellen," he said to Mother in the dining room, while I listened and wondered that she should have such an odd duck for a brother, "if I can get a jawb I'll work like a son of a bitch."

Mother blushed deeply and made a quick sign, indicating that one should be careful of one's language in the presence of the young. Jim caught the signal and said, "Don't pay any attention to what I say, Ellen. I been drinkin'. But the reason I come out here is that I been blackballed by the railroads in the East. They got something agin me, Ellen, and the sons of bitches won't let me work for any road in the East. Maybe they ain't heard about the blackball out here,

and I might get back to brakin'. That's my work, Ellen. I'm the best brakeman on any freight train in the East, and I can work like a son of a bitch."

Inquiries about his domestic affairs brought the news that he had left home and family a long time ago, when there were only about six or eight children. He couldn't stand his wife, he said.

That first day, Jim couldn't keep from using the term that seemed so objectionable to Mother, though several times she told him not to use it in the presence of ladies or children. To me it seemed strange that son of a bitch should be so important. My father never used the expression, and the hired men used it only in connection with horses. If Jim meant that he would work like a horse, why didn't he say so? All horses were sons of bitches, I understood from our hired men.

Jim explained that he had not been working on the railroad for a long and unspecified time. He had been tramping through the Ozarks in Arkansas and Missouri, selling Great Forest Remedy to the inhabitants. He explained that this was a medicine that would cure all ills, especially chills and fever.

Besides the clothes he was wearing, Jim said, he had a telescope full of belongings at Old Tom Fahey's saloon, on East Douglas avenue. He explained that he had got off a train in the yards, having ridden in the caboose with the conductor, free, from Kansas City. He had entered the first saloon he came to and inquired if anyone knew Flurry Driscoll. Everybody there knew Flurry, so Jim had stayed and had a few drinks before starting on the long walk to the farm.

Mother explained to me later that it was easy to see that Jim had been hanging out at the Fahey bar for many days and nights, had finally used up all his money and all the credit that the relationship with the Driscolls could buy, and then had been bundled out by Old Man Fahey. She gave the old man credit for having bought Jim a cheap suit and clean shirt in which to make his first appearance at the farm. Also, she said, Fahey undoubtedly had furnished Jim with the hair of the dog and then driven him out to within about a quarter of a mile of our house, warning him to say nothing about



that. Fahey wanted the friendship and patronage of the farm, and he feared that if he drove up with a drunken bum relative and unloaded him, after having permitted him to spend his last dime at the saloon, he might lose both.

Jim sized up the situation at his sister's home very quickly, and proceeded to operate on a cunning hunch. It was easy to see that Big Flurry and his wife were not getting on, and no secret was made of the fact that the Old Man wanted to throw in the sponge and go back to Ireland.

"Flurry, you're workin' too hard," said Jim, on the first night of a visit that was destined to be long and important.

"You know, Ellen, the big fellow is gettin' whupped. Yes, I see him from the road, when I was walkin' along below the house, and as soon as I see him I says to meself, 'Big Flurry is gettin' whupped. He's workin' too hard.'"

"Flurry needs a rest. He needs to take it easy. He ain't so young as he was, and this farm is whuppin' him. He needs to play a little. I think he ought to sell out here and go back to Erie. I'll get him an easy jawb, Ellen. He can't go on workin' like a son of a bitch all his life."

This was addressed partly to Mother and partly to the Old Man, but exclusively for its effect on the latter. The effect was magical. Big Flurry at last had found in his wife's brother a man who understood his case. The two adjourned to the cellar, where Big Flurry could be heard crying over a final pitcher of wine, late in the night, while declaiming about his troubles, not forgetting the half a pound of tay.

That fall, Dad had made seven barrels of wine, instead of the three or four he had made in previous years. He had some left over from last year, enough to carry him along until the new wine should be fit to consume. He never waited until the wine was old before imbibing. New wine was good enough.

Jim helped the Old Man with chores, currying horses, feeding hogs and cattle, cleaning the stable, and other light work. He didn't care much for real farm labor. He wasn't handy with farm machinery.

The two became buddies at once. Dad sized Jim up as a bit lazy,

a heavy drinker, and something of a bum. But he blamed all of these unfortunate characteristics upon Jim's wife and family, who, he was informed, did not appreciate him. Wives and families, Jim explained, had an unfortunate way of not appreciating the hard-working husband and father. They picked up American ideas too damn fast.

So Big Flurry took Jim to town with him. They stopped at Fahey's saloon, collected Jim's valise, and quite a load besides. Also, the Old Man paid a bill that Jim had run up in Dad's name, during the recent long visit. The Old Man would never tell Mother how much the bill amounted to. He said it was a small matter.

As the cold weather came in, Jim and Big Flurry were often quite under the weather before breakfast. The Old Man, probably at Jim's suggestion, had laid in a five-gallon jug of rye and several half-gallon stone jugs of Holland gin. These delectable ingredients, judiciously mingled with liberal pitchers of home-made wine, had startling effects.

One morning, while waiting for the pancake batter to be stirred up for breakfast, Jim was lackadaisically knocking off a few sticks of wood with an axe, his inept blows constantly threatening his ankles.

Big Flurry took the axe from him and showed him how to hold the stick of wood with the left foot, and how to chop it off with one stroke. Then, holding the axe in one hand, he cried in a loud voice, evidently intended to be heard in the house:

"Jim, you know this Ed Blood that you sees around here?"

"Yes, Flurry, I see him the other day."

"Well, I think I'm best knock him in the head with this axe."

"Oh, Flurry, I wouldn't do that! You might get into trouble that way. And maybe he ain't so bad as you think."

"Yes, Jim, I'm best knock him in the head with this axe the next time he comes here. The God-damned Moorman could be satisfied with all the other women, without running afther a fine gaarl like Manie. I'll knock him in the head, as sure as there's a lake in County Kerry. There's no law agin killing Moormans. Sure, don't we hire soldiers to kill them?"

Breakfast was somewhat formal that morning. Neither Jim nor Big Flurry was quite sure whether he was eating muffins or pancakes.

On another winter morning, when the sun was melting ice from the trees around the house, and I was looking out through a dining-room window at the drama of the falling crystals, Big Flurry and Jim, having imbibed copiously, were again in the back yard, near the kitchen door.

Dad called, "Manie-gaar!" and Marie stepped to the door.

"A dinner ye're having tonight, I don't know?"

"Yes, we've invited some friends to dinner."

"Is the Queen of the Perarie going to be here, I don't know?"

"You mean Old Lady Blood? Yes, she has been invited."

Big Flurry, in his best dramatic mood, went down upon one knee, holding high his axe in his right hand.

"She shan't come oncet!" he chanted, bringing down the axe with a terrific swing to the ground.

Raising the right hand with the axe, he chanted again, "She shan't come twicet!"

His face was lifted to heaven and his eyes shone with fanatical fire as he raised the axe again and shouted:

"She shan't come three times!"

He rose to his feet and bowed his head, as if seeking strength in prayer.

Jim, willing to justify himself with the women of the household, stepped close to the Old Man and began talking in confidential tones.

"Oh, now, Flurry, I wouldn't be so hard on the Queen. She's a foolish old lady and maybe she puts on airs, but I don't think she means no harm, Flurry. She never said a word agin you, Flurry, I'm sure of that. They say she admires you and wishes that you wouldn't work yourself to death."

The Old Man burst into maudlin tears. He threw away his axe as a sign of surrender, and shouted, "She can come all she wants to, Jim!"

On another day, the Old Man assumed a more determined atti-

tude toward the problem that was occupying so much of his time and thought. Ed Blood was making regular Friday night visits, staying late, talking with Marie in the parlor. He had a way of whipping up his horse just before turning into our driveway, so as to make a tremendous entrance with what might appear to be an extremely spirited horse, hard to hold in.

To increase the apparent wildness of his tame but slightly nervous mare, he carried a six-shooter and fired it off at the dogs that came out to bark at him from across the road. The dogs ran out when they heard Ed cracking his whip to speed up Gyp. Five or six shots from the revolver scared the horse, hurt nobody, and made the entrance so much more impressive.

Big Flurry went to work on a scheme that Friday afternoon. Working fast, he felled three big cottonwood trees so that they lay directly across the driveway. Young Lochinvar would break his God-damned neck tonight, said the Old Man, as he contemplated his job in the dusk.

The family was in a terrific dither. Mother solved the problem by sending me down to the road beyond the driveway, to warn Ed of the fallen trees. I had to sneak down in the heavy shadows of the hedges, so that Dad wouldn't call me back. I stopped Lochinvar just as he was applying the rawhide to the mare for the dust-throwing last stretch. I told him of the trees across the drive. He tied Gyp silently to a post at the end of the driveway, and walked up, avoiding the barriers.

That winter Big Flurry used the Blood affair as justification for his first and only real drinking bout. He had had an occasional isolated battle with the bottle in previous years, though it was rank heresy to mention it in the household. The theory that the Old Man had never been under the influence of alcohol, and, indeed, never took more than a glass of beer, was to be maintained at all costs. In pursuance of this theory, I never mentioned to the family an unfortunate incident that I had witnessed, several years before *l'Affaire Blood*.

I chanced to be in the east yard one afternoon, and saw Dad coming home from town in amazing style. The horses were gallop-

ing up the hill. Now, Big Flurry held to the doctrine that only a fool would make a horse trot up even a slight rise, say nothing of running a team wildly up a goodly elevation. So I was alarmed.

My alarm became consternation when I noted that Himself was swaying in the driver's seat, apparently about to fall off. I rushed into the yard where the team would have to stop. The horses came to a sudden halt, puffing and lathering with foam. They had been running a considerable distance, pulling a load of manure. The Old Man evidently had got drunk on the way home, after loading his wagon with manure for a sandy field.

As the team stopped, the Old Man fell back into the manure, on his back, his feet hoisted upon the seat.

I climbed up on the wagon-wheel and asked what was the matter.

"Poppa's sick!" murmured the Old Man, and retained his faculty of speech long enough to add, "Don't tell Momma."

Because I had been ordered not to tell, and because I realized that this must be that unspeakable crime of getting drunk, I never mentioned the incident. I put the horses away. The Old Man crawled down out of his bed of manure and sobered up in a haystack.

That was the only instance, prior to the Uncle Jim winter, in which I, in my innocence of such matters, could be certain that the Old Man was intoxicated.

In later years, I realized that there had been several occasions when the Old Man's erratic behavior could be explained most logically by presuming that one of his strange mixtures of beverages had gone to his head. But it was always said in the family that Dad appeared to be going crazy, rather than that he had got a drop too much.

During the long series of incidents that made the Uncle Jim winter memorable, Mother said to her brother, "Jim, I'm afraid Flurry is losing his mind. He acts crazy most of the time."

"Crazy drunk!" replied Jim, diagnosing the case correctly, as an expert should.

During this time the plan for returning to Ireland to live in a shack beside the Bay of Roaring Water took more definite shape. The Old Man talked it over, not only with Jim, but with his four

friends in town, Fred Ross, Pat Gould, Gus Sauer and John McGowan. He frequently saddled a horse and rode to Wichita with no apparent purpose except to talk over his troubles with these old friends. Mother had all four of them in her bad books, because the Old Man was always quoting them as sympathizing with him in his misery.

Fred Ross was a wizened little old bachelor who ran a seed store and commission business. Pat Gould had a feed store and corn-grinding mill. He was a tall, thin, freckled, red-headed fellow with small blue eyes and a sweeping red mustache. Gus Sauer was a diminutive druggist who had inherited the business from his father, pioneer druggist of the frontier town. McGowan operated the tea store.

This cabinet was unanimous in its decision that the Old Man was not appreciated at home, and therefore should go back to Ireland if he wished to do so.

Mother was humiliated by the circumstance that the Old Man should be talking over family affairs with strangers. If there was one thing worse than being a devil at home, she said, it was going around the town, discussing it with a bunch of old he-gossips.

Though he talked about going to Ireland, the Old Man went about his farm work as though he intended to stay with it for life. Even in the spring and fall of the Year of Jim, he planted and transplanted trees, planning vistas and windbreaks that could not grow into usefulness inside of twenty years. As I helped with this work, the Old Man sometimes said, "See, now, see. This way you must set it, so that it grows fine and tall and straight. Charlie, me bye, this three will be giving cool chade to somebody when I'm far away."

This was said with an intonation of infinite sadness. I could not decide whether the Old Man meant that he would be in heaven or in Ireland. Maybe he had both in mind, or had the two confused.

Jim helped in a desultory manner with the winter work. As spring began to put green into the willows, he talked of taking to the road again, if only he could buy a kit of Great Forest Remedy. He would sell like a son of a bitch, he said.

Mother talked over plans with Jim. One evening she said, "Jim, why don't you ever go to church?"

"Oh, Ellen, I quit that foolishness a long time ago."

"But, Jim, I worry about you, and Fannie worries about you. Running over the tops of those freight trains, you are apt to be killed any time. And you wouldn't want to die in mortal sin."

"It's been a hell of a long time since I done any runnin' on top of trains, Ellen. I wish I could get back to it. You are a good woman, Ellen. I wish you'd pray that them sons of bitches in Erie would take the blackball off of me and let me get back on top of the trains. I'll take my chances, Ellen."

"I pray for you all the time, Jim. I am saying a novena to Our Lady of Victory now, and Father Baker in Buffalo is saying a Mass every day, remembering you in it."

"Well, I hope he remembers that I want a jawb. Maybe he can put the curse on them sons of bitches that blackballed me, and I'll be back brakin' in no time. That's damn nice of you Ellen, to get all that prayin' done for me. But I ain't goin' to church right now."

"What is it about the church that you don't like, Jim?"

"Well, Ellen, I don't go for that stuff about the priest forgivin' sin."

Mother turned pale. It took her half a minute to get a grip on herself, so that she could speak.

"Jim," she said, solemnly, "the devil tempts you to talk like that."

"No, Ellen, it was you that tempted me. You ast me and I told you the truth. I don't believe in none of that stuff, only maybe the devil does have a good deal to do with things. I see the devil once, Ellen."

"Well, Jim, I'm afraid you'll see him again if you don't repent of your sins and come back to the church."

"He ain't a bad son of a bitch, Ellen. I was walkin' along the track, right near a bridge, when we run over a tramp at night. It was a wicked cold night, Ellen. I was away back, a half a mile behind where the train was stopped, settin' out flares while they looked for the tramp.

"I was walkin' along that way, Ellen, and I see the poor tramp,

all mangled, on the right o' way. And there was the devil, waggin' his tail and standin' over the tramp. He come to get his man, Ellen, as sure as I'm a right son of a bitch.

"I walked on up the track, like I hadn't seen nothin', but the first thing I knew, there was the devil, walkin' along beside me, holdin' up his tail so's he wouldn't get it caught. He grinned at me as friendly as anything, Ellen, and I had a mind to bid him the time of day, but I was that scared. He skipped into the dark when we got near the train.

"You know, Ellen, they never found hide nor hair of that tramp. The devil just flew off to hell with him."

"Well, Jim, you probably had been drinking and were scared, and you just imagined all that."

"Ellen, I hope that God will strike me dead and give all my kids the smallpox if I don't tell you the gospel truth, just like as if I was in front of the altar. Strike me dead before I leave this spot, God, and give my kids the smallpox, if I lie! And my wife, too, God, give her the smallpox anyhow!"

"Jim, you're blaspheming the Holy Name of God. I wouldn't listen to you, only I want to get you to promise to come with me and talk to Father Tihen about your doubts. You can't doubt after he talks to you. It's because you don't understand."

"No, Ellen, I don't have nothing to do with them priests. They're always on the women's side. Wasn't the priest on my wife's side, and didn't he say I was desertin' my family? That's a hell of a thing to say about a hard-workin' son of a bitch!"

Letters came from Aunt Fannie, containing money to buy a new peddling set of Great Forest Remedy, and a little extra money, fifteen dollars or more, to get Jim started in his career again. So the spring day came when Dad was to drive Jim to the depot, and Jim was to take a caboose for the Southwest, where he said he would work like a son of a bitch, curing the farmers of their ills.

There was a look of sadness in Mother's face as she pressed the money into the weak hand of her good-for-nothing brother. How many sisters have looked that way at how many worthless brothers!

A week later, Jim was back. Instead of boarding a caboose, he



had crossed the street to Fahey's saloon. This time, Tom Fahey in person deposited Jim on our back porch.

Jim was in bad shape. But he received little sympathy this time. He was allowed to stay. He was fed, and his clothes were washed. Dad paid no attention to him. At the end of a week he departed, afoot, with five dollars that Mother had got together for him.

We never heard from him again. Aunt Fannie had a letter from some unknown person in Texas, saying that Jim had been killed by a train. She immediately began having Masses said for the repose of his soul.

Mother said Auntie was foolish to believe that story. She said Jim undoubtedly had cooked it up and had a buddy write the letter, probably with the object of changing his name and marrying some trollop in Texas.

*Uncle Jim taught Van how to fight with his fists.*

*John said that Jim didn't know how to fight. He demonstrated exactly how Gentleman Jim Corbett held his fists, how he took his stance, and how he shifted his weight from right to left and back again.*

*But Jim said that he knew nothing of gentleman fighting. He only knew how it was done in saloons, in the railroad yards, and in jungles along the tracks.*

*"You hit as hard as you can," he told Van, "and don't be thinkin' about Christianity or any such stuff. First, you must learn to hit hard."*

*So Van hung up a bag of sand in the buggy shed. Every day he spent an hour or two poking that hard bag of sand. He learned to put in some terrific wallops.*

*Van was skinny and nervous, and was thought to be delicate. He had had no respect for himself since, at a country school commencement, he had fled from a town boy named Johnny Moss, who was threatening to beat him up. The humiliation of that retreat had made Van determine to disregard the parental ban on fighting.*

*After a winter under Uncle Jim's instruction, Van was able to beat me into complete submission inside of a minute, in any fight. Theretofore, I had always handled him easily.*

*Van went out looking for his old enemies, and licked them all.*

*So anxious was he to make up for his shameful retreat from Johnny Moss that he licked policemen, conductors, and even gangsters, during the next forty years. Many a victory he owed to Uncle Jim.*

## 22

ONE August day came a telegram from Ed Blood, in Denver. He had presented affidavits that proved to the satisfaction of the Bishop out there that he had never been validly married. Permission had been given to have the marriage performed in Denver.

So, one happy daughter, her girlhood cares behind her, went out of the old house. Margaret went along to be bridesmaid.

Almost immediately thereafter, John left for a new job as head of the small commercial department of St. John's Lutheran College, in Winfield. When Margaret returned from the wedding it was time for her to start a new term of teaching. This time she taught the Blood School, opposite the home of Ed's parents, and boarded with the newly married couple, half a mile away.

The house was lonely indeed now, and there was an atmosphere that was laden with the scent of doom.

Himself brooded over the lost daughter, but never again said a word against Ed Blood. Never again did he refer to the Moorman or the Queen of the Perarie. Indeed, he became quite friendly with the son-in-law, and the following summer hired him to harvest his wheat crop. But, while he avoided reference to the Queen, he also avoided meeting her.

Ed was making a reputation as the most resourceful and energetic farmer in the Valley.

Whether crops succeeded or failed, he made money. He had the knack of getting the most out of hired labor. His size, strength, energy and speed of action, plus a reputation for quick and effective use of his fists, gave him command. He dressed a little better than most farmers, but not in a dudish way. He wore the picturesque

clothes of the old plains, wide hat, loud-colored woolen shirt, corduroy trousers tucked into high boots, and sturdy coat.

He went into action long before sunup, got three hours more work out of his men than any other farmer, and promptly knocked down any man who disputed him. You couldn't blame any romantic girl for defying pastor and parent to marry him, disbelieving all the gossip of the countryside.

He fed cattle by the thousand, but raised no cattle at all. He bought grass-fed steers while on long horseback journeys through the Flint Hills, had them driven to his pens south of Wichita. Then he visited about among the farmers who were bewailing their inability to sell their crops, and bought corn, fodder, alfalfa, whatever was needed. He never bothered with buying by the ton or bushel.

"I'll give you a thousand dollars for your crop," he said. The farmer took the money and delivered the crop at Ed's pens. He told his neighbors that Ed Blood was crazy, but a good fellow to have in the Valley.

He ranged up and down the highways on horseback, looking for undiscovered opportunities. Most of the roads were bordered on both sides by Osage hedge. This is a tough form of vegetation, flourishing throughout the semi-arid plains. It's known simply as hedge to the residents. I never knew there was such a thing as a hawthorn hedge or a privet hedge until I moved eastward. Hedge is hedge in Kansas, but the books call it Osage hedge. It grows as a tree if you let it alone. The wood is hard and tough, and the grain is twisted.

It was customary in pioneer days to plow a furrow along the borders of your farm and lay in sprouts of Osage hedge, bought from a nursery. Then you plowed another furrow and covered them up. In two years you had a bristling row of hedge trees, three or four feet tall, even in the dry years.

Most farmers, if they had time and labor available, laid the hedge at a certain stage. There was a special axe, called a hedge-knife, for this job, and hedge layers were skilled men. The hedge-knife, somewhat resembling some forms of the Algerian battle-axe, was

kept very sharp. The workman attacked a row of hedge that had grown ten or twelve feet high. By striking the young trees so as to cut about three-quarters of the distance through, and then bending the tree to earth, a fence was made, three or four feet high.

The Osage bears nasty thorns. After being laid into a complicated fence, it sprouts vertically at once. In another year it has created such a thick hedge of thorns that few animals would care to attempt going through it, if the pattern were perfect. Unfortunately for those who put their faith in hedge, it seldom was perfect.

When the farmers learned that the laid hedge was undependable because here and there a plant had died, here and there a laid sapling had failed to sprout, they tried to mend the fence by driving stakes or stringing patches of barbed wire. Eventually, if you had to keep cattle in, you simply planted a row of posts inside the hedge fence, perhaps three or four feet away from it, and strung a real barbed wire fence. So far as fencing in livestock was concerned, you were just as well off without the hedge as with it.

But every farmer had to learn this lesson for himself. The result of many lessons was thousands of miles of Osage hedge, grown into big, gnarled trees, full of thorns and hedge-balls.

The fruit of the Osage hedge is a round ball, about the size of the average grapefruit. It is properly called the Osage orange, but is known to the natives as the hedge-ball. When I was going to school, this fruit had but one use. It made a good piece of ammunition to throw at any boy with whom you were not on the best of terms. It exuded a thick, rubbery milk when wounded. It was said to be poisonous, but in what way or to what degree I have never heard. Anyway, it was inedible. Millions of these fruits rotted along every hedgerow in the plains region every fall.

Ed Blood, riding the highways, thought much about the hedges. He knew, as did every other native of the Valley, that the grown trees made the best fence posts available in that region. They were hard, resisted decay, and had a certain spring to them, resembling that of hickory. Hickory doesn't grow in that area.

So he that had been Young Lochinvar rode up to the farmhouse that was on a quarter section surrounded by a full-grown line of

hedge, passed the time of day with the family, petted the dog, had dinner with the household, and offered the farmer a cash price, out of hand, for all the hedge around and on his farm.

"I'll give you three hundred dollars for it," he said, "in cash, right now. I'll cut it down this winter and dig up the roots. That hedge saps the soil, you know, and shades out about forty acres of your land. It's a Jonah to you. You ought to pay me a thousand, but I'll give you three hundred instead. What do you say?"

Ed brought out a roll of bills, and the farmer and his wife quickly said yes.

He went down the road and did the same thing, mile on mile. Then he began hiring men. For months, in dead of winter and on into the beginning of spring, he drove gangs of sweating workers. His farmer neighbors, in many instances, were glad to get a dollar a day for swinging hedge-knife, axe, pick and sledge, in the well-organized job of turning miles of gnarled, thorny trees and brush into money for Ed Blood.

First, every possible post was cut out of the hedge. Ranchers and railroad companies would buy these by thousands, at a good price.

The limbs were stripped and cut into lengths easily handled. Later, these would be chopped or sawed into firewood, to be sold at top prices, for hedge made the best possible wood fire.

Then came the job of taking out the stumps, after the useless brush had been piled on top of them and burned. A deep trench was run on each side of the line of stumps, tap roots were cut with axes. Men and horses pulled the stubborn stumps out.

Passing farmers said, "That damned fool, Ed Blood, has ruined himself. He paid cash for hedge, and he loses it all on the stumpin'."

When the stumps had been hauled to Ed's yard and piled like mountains beside the other mountains of hedge poles, the trenches were filled and the land was left smooth and clean.

Then began the power sawing job in the Blood yard. For two weeks or more, Ed bossed a gang of twenty men, turning stumps and poles into salable wood by means of a circular saw, powered by a steam engine.

He was the first to discover that you could get more for the

sawed-up stumps than for regular cordwood, because hedge stumps burned like coal.

He worried about the rotting hedge-balls, talked with nurserymen about the waste. Yes, the nurseries would be glad to buy them for seed, if they could be made to yield separate seeds in merchantable condition. Ed devised a method of curing the big fruit in barrels. He sold tons of the seeds to nurserymen.

Probably the biggest laugh the neighbors ever had on the much-discussed Ed Blood was occasioned by the sight of full-grown men, in his pay, crawling and walking along the hedgerows, gathering the despised and notoriously worthless hedge-balls.

Big Flurry and his spectacular son-in-law sat on the back porch, smoking Ed's expensive cigars. It was "Dad" and "Ed" now. The younger man had won, and the fond father hoped for the best.

"How did you come out on the hedge work this winter, Ed, I don't know?"

Followed an accounting in big figures. So many thousands for the hedgerows, so many thousands for labor; sawing and hauling came to so many thousands. Interest on the bank money was so much, and board for the men was estimated roughly at a certain figure.

Big Flurry followed the recital, item by item, making no comment except, "Aye, aye," as he noted, added and subtracted the items mentally.

When the story was finished, the father-in-law lit another cigar and commented sagely, "Well, Ed, 'tis a hard world to make a living in. You kept the money circulating, anyhow. As near as I can make out you made something for yourself. A-a-a, five and seven is how much—aye, about twelve. So. You made enough to feed the harses if they didn't eat too much, ourself."

Yes, the dashing entrepreneur admitted, expenses were heavy in this kind of work. It takes a lot of spending to make money. The trouble with most farmers is that they won't spend money.

"Aye, aye, 'tis a good thing to keep money circulating. It puts bread into the mouths of lots of babies.

"There was a naygar that chuelled coal along with Mike Downey

and meself on the Pittsburgh docks in Ashtabula. He threw down his chuvel one Saturday night and told us he was going to be a business man.

"Sure enough, he rents some barges and hires dock wallopers himself, and in six months he is a great noise on the lakes. He comes back to see the byes one Saturday, and buys beer for us.

" "'Tis a rich man you are now, ourself,' says I.

"Says he, 'No, Mr. Driscoll, I ain't rich. It costs a lot of money to keep the barges going.'

"So I asks him what he makes and how he spends it, and when he gets through telling me, says I, 'Well, you don't come out even, so. Where are you going to get money to feed your family?'

"Says he, 'I ain't got that figgered out, sir, but look at all the business I'm doin'.'

"He was a nice naygar, and a good hand he was when he come back to his chuvel and worked to pay off his debts."

Ed laughed politely and suggested that he had better be getting along, since cattle eat on Sundays as well as weekdays.





*On a farm where there is not very much money, there is always a question about the balance between farm machinery and household conveniences.*

*A very stingy man, I understood, or a foreigner, will spend all the money on implements to make work easier for him in the fields. He will buy a disc harrow, a gang plow or a wheat binder, leaving his poor wife and daughters to slave away in the house with an old-fashioned stove and no pump.*

*Yet certain implements are necessary, in order that crops be produced, so that some day one may buy conveniences or fineries for the house.*

*Where should implement buying stop and household buying begin?*

*There was never much trouble about this on our farm. Dad never owned a riding plow. He said that a man who couldn't walk behind a plow was no better than a half-pay English officer.*

*Once he bought a new cultivator of steel. It was arranged for riding or walking. Dad took the seat off and allowed us to sell it to the junk man. He thanked God that he could still walk, and he did not want to be a dude.*

*Mother bought most of the household things out of her butter and egg and blackberry money.*

*Once, when the small money was coming in fast, and Mother had so much saved up that she thought she might go and have her operation now any time, the Old Man came to her with a proposition. His debts were piling up, and he needed seed that he couldn't pay for.*

*Proudly, she brought her savings and poured them into his hat. He looked a little foolish, and he was very gentle for a long time.*

## 23

ONE of Mother's unremitting grievances had to do with the water supply for the house.

During the first few years on the Valley farm, the only pump was down by the cow corral, easily half a city block from the house. It was the business of the women to pump and haul water in buckets from this green wooden pump to the kitchen, for cooking, dish-washing, scrubbing, washing and drinking. Since Mother and Marie were the only ones available for this work during this period, most of the water hauling devolved upon them.

A pump was not an expensive piece of farm equipment. The green wooden pump, and another like it, installed later, were got at a sale, second-hand. When they had served their time, we used iron pitcher pumps, with short iron handles.

It was necessary to dig only about six feet to strike water. At this depth, one started driving a lead pipe, about an inch and a half in diameter, supplied with a point, three feet long, which was covered with fine copper screen. The driving was done with a ten-pound sledge-hammer. One person held the pipe upright, one held a piece of hard wood over the top of the pipe, and a third struck regular blows upon the wooden pad with the sledge-hammer. When the point would go down no farther, you had struck hard-pan, which was a silt formation at the bottom of the underground river.

You screwed a pitcher pump on the top of the topmost joint of pipe, primed the pump with about a quart of water, and started pumping. In half an hour you had clear, potable water.

It was a simple operation which a man and two boys could accomplish in half of a rainy day. Usually, we had two or three

unused pitcher pumps lying in the granary. We had rods of unused pipe. Why Himself didn't put a pump on the back porch, or in the kitchen, where there was plenty of room for half a dozen pumps, nobody was able to comprehend. It seemed that the only answer was that he didn't think it necessary. Hauling water in buckets would never hurt anybody. He probably did not know that this form of exercise is bad for women in general, and particularly bad for pregnant women.

The water available to us was so hard as to constitute a big handicap to housekeeping. It contained heavy deposits of gypsum and salt. If a teakettle were not scraped and cleaned at least once a week, it would, in the course of a year, be filled to the brim with a hard cake of white mineral. This was the deposit left when boiling water was taken off in steam. We didn't know that the water was revolting to the taste, because we had so seldom tasted any other kind of water. It did not seem to be bad for the health. I never heard of anybody in the Valley having kidney stone or gallstone, although a layman might think that continued consumption of this liquid would fill one up with stone, as it filled the teakettles.

Many of the neighbors had cisterns under or adjacent to their houses, with a handy cistern pump on the porch or in the house. In these cisterns the rainwater that fell on roofs was collected. During the long dry seasons, cistern water was a great help, especially for bathing and for regular washing of face and hands.

Some families used cistern water for drinking, too. When we were visiting at the Gleason home in the uplands, I was given, as a special treat, a glass of the soft water that had come down as rain. I was violently nauseated. A system that had become attuned to gypsum and salt in the water couldn't stand the sweet tastelessness of soft water.

When Himself was in his softer moods, Mother worked on him for a cistern. In winter we generally had at least one hired man who worked for his board and lodging. Sometimes there was no important work for these men to do. They would rather be engaged in a working project than idling about between stock feedings. Mother often talked to these men about a cistern. Sure, they said, they would

be glad to get to work digging it. As for cementing walls and floor, that would be a simple job, and cheap.

The Old Man listened silently while a man named George told of his prowess as a cistern builder. But when George had the bad taste to say that a cistern sure made housework easier for the women, Big Flurry cast one freezing glance at him and said, "Jarge, you'm best go out and bed the harses now. If you sit here you'll be siling your hands with the hard dishwater, ourself."

To all entreaties for a cistern, Dad answered, if he deigned to answer at all, that a cistern is a vanyitty. That it is a trap to drown children in. That it fills up with drowned rats, mice, lizards, snakes and cats, causing the water to overflow and make puddles in the yard. That soft water is not fit for human use, and is notoriously likely to cause death, as, indeed, it did in the case of his own poor auld father. That a certain amount of lime and salt in the water is required to form strong bodies, as witness the strong men and fast horses that come from Ireland, where the water under the soil is notably mineral and soft water is abhorred.

"Great God, Wooman, do you think Dan'l O'Connell was raised on soft wather?"

The Fountzes, over east, had a cistern, Mother reported, and Mrs. Fountz was saying how much easier the washing was now, and how little Ralph was thriving since he began drinking soft water.

"'Tis no wondher before God that her son is a pissabed!" was the only answer of Big Flurry to this citation.

There was a compromise. The Old Man put down another pump, much nearer the house. In fact, the water-haulers now had to walk only about fifty feet from the pump to the back steps, up two or three steps to the porch, and so into the kitchen.

Water for dishwashing and most other household purposes was heated in the reservoir. A teakettle did what it could to piece out the supply.

The reservoir on the old Superior stove, in the days before the fire sale and the Quick Meal range, held about two gallons, but did not raise the water to any dangerous temperature. The stove and reservoir were of iron, of ancient design, bought second-hand at a

sale before the family moved to the Valley. The reservoir had a funny iron lid that bore the cast-iron inscription:

BOTH DAMPERS UP TO BAKE  
UPPER DAMPER UP AND LOWER DAMPER DOWN  
TO HEAT THE RESERVOIR

Because there were few things to memorize or talk about, we boys made a chant of this inscription, as is the way of children. We must have driven our elders frantic on bad-weather days, when we spent most of our time in the kitchen. A thousand times, in duet and singly, we would chant the inscription on the reservoir, in a singsong, silly fashion.

The Superior stove had a small firebox. In theory, it would take a stick of wood 14 inches long. This theory was arrived at by sticking a yardstick through the front door of the firebox until it hit the back wall. Back wall to front door, 14 inches. So the hired men were told to chop the firewood in 14-inch lengths.

In practice, you couldn't get these sticks into the stove. The hired men always made them a little longer than 14 inches, including the tail of each stick, formed by the slant of the axe-blow. Besides, the firebox might hold one stick exactly 14 inches long, but it had to have half a dozen sticks in it when a lively fire was going. We boys who brought in the fuel learned to chop wood by cutting the regular sticks in two so that they would be usable.

Most of our fuel was cottonwood. Tree trimmings, blown-down trees, and posts that had rotted off at the ground, constituted the chief sources of supply. Cottonwood is a soft wood. When full of sap or water, it won't burn at all. When very dry, it goes up like straw.

Water and wood were as closely related in our economy as they were in the calculations of the masters of sailing ships. The house could not operate without plenty of wood and water.

The kitchen stove was unsatisfactory for other reasons. The oven was small. Mother had baking of some sort to do every day. It took a good many loaves of bread to feed so large a household, and Mother baked all of them. Cakes and pies were not rare treats, as in

so many city homes of today, but daily provender. In season, the pantry shelves were never without a row of apple pies, three to a dozen in a row. Most of the family ate huge slabs of cold apple pie for breakfast, and there was a hunk in almost every dinner pail in school time.

But the oven in this antiquated stove leaked ashes through a crack in its roof. Mother was continually stopping up this crack with gravel and tamped clay. Yet it would open up from time to time and shower her best cakes and loaves with wood ashes. Seldom have I seen anyone more stricken with an overpowering sense of futility than was Mother when she took out of the oven a fine chocolate cake with an encrustation of ashes over its top.

The domestic situation was complicated when there was no dry stovewood. How could anybody cook or bake, or even heat coffee, with a cracked, antiquated stove and only green or wet wood to feed it?

For many months at a time there would be great stacks of dry firewood in the back yard. But it might happen that, before a convenient season for replenishing the supply arrived, the stacks would be used up. Perhaps the kitchen would make shift with corncobs, chips, twigs and old lumber until Himself and the hired men could manage to haul up dry wood and cut it.

You couldn't bake with a cob fire. It was a quick, hot, shortlived fire, too hot while it lasted, and too cool when it died down. Dirty cobs were better than clean cobs, to be sure, but the women were excusably reticent about the handling of dirty cobs.

Clean cobs came from the horses' feed boxes, from the feed troughs of the fattening steers, and from the stacks left by the cornsheller. They were good for getting up steam in the kettle in the morning, and for livening up the fire when the chief fuel was wet or green wood. But it kept one person busy at least half the time, firing the stove with cobs.

Now, dirty cobs were another form of merchandise. You got those out of the hog pens, where the hogs had been eating corn on the cob for generations. There were acres of cobs there, from one to four feet deep.

But these cobs were more or less deeply encrusted with dried hog manure. The best for fuel were those that were completely encrusted with dried manure. They burned with a beautiful glow. There was just enough light fuel in the cob to consume the encrustation, which might weigh two or three times as much as the core.

When I had to feed the fire myself, as happened on days when I was useless for more profitable labor, I gathered bushels of dirty cobs and had a fine fire that kept the lids of the stove red hot. The girls, however, rebelled at handling the dirty cobs, because such handling undoubtedly leaves a certain persistent aroma on one's hands. I was never one to object to the odor of healthy hog manure.

When water was to be heated for bathing, cobs were much in demand. The quick, hot fire was just the thing. If you mixed the clean and dirty cobs in proper proportions, you could even get a faint steam from the reservoir.

The favorite time for bathing was during or after a very heavy rain. Deluges that make the dry earth run rivulets and torrents are enjoyable features of the Kansas climate. The fall of water in some of these cloudbursts is sometimes of a semi-tropical nature.

When clouds indicated that such a storm was at hand, we began setting out containers to catch the water. There was a 57-gallon whiskey barrel on the ground, at one corner of the back porch, and there were v-shaped troughs, made of four by one-half lumber, equipped with wire bails, to be adjusted so as to lead water from the roof into the barrel. We had no rain gutters on our house, so these makeshift devices were a great help.

There were usually half a dozen tubs about the house. They might be of galvanized iron, tin, cedar staves, or paper. Paper tubs and buckets were much in favor at one time. They were solid, reddish, thick, and heavy. Neither better nor worse, apparently, than any other tub, except that they did not fall apart in extremely dry weather, as the cedar tubs sometimes did.

The tubs would be set at strategic points at the edges of the porches, or on the ground, where great cascades descended from the roofs. There might be one copper boiler and one galvanized



iron boiler. They were both set out. Next, the milk buckets of all kinds and sizes, dinner pails, syrup buckets, gallon crocks, and anything else that would hold water.

It was great fun, bustling about while the torrents were falling, getting drenched to the skin, trying to make a record for amount of water caught. What need had we of a cistern?

The reservoir and teakettle were filled at once, while the storm was beginning. Dishpans were filled and put on the stove. If you were enterprising, you arranged to have the first bath of the day while the storm was in progress, so that the water you used would not subtract any drop from the supply available at the end of the rain.

It seemed too bad to take a tub out of the water-catching service, but it had to be done. You carried into the middle of the kitchen floor a galvanized tub, with as much water in it as you could lift. Then you poured in hot water from the teakettle and dishpans, filled up those receptacles for the next bather, and got into the tub with a bar of Kirk's White Russian soap and a big washrag.

What a bath! You were so clean when you finished that you marveled at the whiteness of your skin. You felt wonderful.

By this time a family bathing schedule had been arranged. If the storm continued, you simply emptied your dirty water into the general flood in the back yard, and set the tub to catch some more water, so that the next bather could be as economical of the great blessing as you had been.

In such a storm, no farm work could go forward anyway, so everybody could bathe in his turn. Big Flurry held these bathing carnivals to be nothing but vanity and a wicked waste of soap. He took no part in them. As to the general hair-washing that followed, he would not even pretend to notice it.

Himself did not hold by traditions of toiletry. I cannot recall seeing him washing his hair. When he died, at 84 years, he had a perfect head of long, thick, curly white hair. Although he never brushed his teeth, he managed to carry 31 strong, white teeth, untouched by any dentist, to his grave.

We used to ask Mother if Dad ever took a bath, and she said, "Why, of course he does. He has the river, hasn't he? He doesn't like tubs, but lots of people are that way."

As to the river, I do not know. But I do know that the Old Man once took a bath in a tub. I was a small youngster, about my make-believe play. Pursuing a pirate, I chased him down the cellar steps and into the cellar.

I heard a piratical roar in the far corner of the dark cellar.

"Get out of here before I lame you with a jar of fruit!"

My eyes did not have time to adjust themselves to the darkness any more than to note that Big Flurry was in the washtub, his back toward me. He was a man of innate modesty, and probably was annoyed far more than necessary over this intrusion.

Farther than this, my records do not speak of bathing on the part of Big Flurry.

Mother, however, was an advocate of bathing. She loved the big bath days, when abundance of soft water tempted every member of the family to total cleanliness. If it happened to be a Saturday, she would announce after supper that she was going to get up early in the morning and go to confession and communion. How many of the family would care to join her?

"It's so much nicer to go to Holy Communion after a good bath in soft water," she said, "that I think a body should take advantage of the rain. I'm sure Our Lord likes to have us be clean and pure in our bodies, as well as in our souls. I can make a good communion tomorrow. We could offer it to Our Lord for the intention of Dad's coming back to the church. And, of course, for the souls of Stevie and Katie."

By the time the last member of the family had bathed, what with supper and dishwashing intervening, it was likely to be midnight. But even if you got to bed so late, you realized that it had been a big day and you hoped there would be another cloudburst soon.

Our neighbors were variously supplied with the amenities of modern life. We heard of families, not too far distant, that had water tanks in their attics, or on towers outside their houses. The windmill force pump forced water into these tanks, and gravity

furnished pressure for a simple sort of plumbing system in the house. I do not recall that any of the houses we heard of, outside the city, had an indoor toilet. Very few townies could afford those. But the people who had high tanks could have water at a spigot, under pressure, in the kitchen, at least.

In our own immediate neighborhood, Steve Balch was certainly the most modernistic farmer in the Valley. Not only did he have riding plows and cultivators, a riding lister and the most modern wagon, but he had a pump room in his new, square, two-story house. In this room were two real zinc sinks and two pitcher pumps: one pump for hard water and one for soft water from the cistern. This room was just off the kitchen, making the cooking far more simple than in most homes.

Dad had great respect for Steve Balch, so he withheld comment on the pump room. As for putting a water tank in an attic, he held that to be sheer architectural folly, since anybody could see that when the tank should spring a leak, the house would be flooded. He never fully accepted the story that townies and grandes had indoor privies. He said that if it were true those people should be ashamed to mention it. Did wild animals attend to physiological elimination in their dens, holes, nests or burrows? None that he knew of, although he had heard of the cuckoo, which was reputed to be, in all essential respects, a townie.

Indians were the dirtiest people Big Flurry had had contact with, but even they did not go to the extreme of installing indoor toilets. The family did not dare to tell him that the Mahans had an indoor toilet in their big new house on South Lawrence avenue. Big Flurry removed his hat when greeting two classes of women. The Sisters of Charity (which included all nuns) and Misthress Mahan. He never removed his broad-brimmed black hat when greeting anybody else, and he had only contempt for men who tipped their hats to a bishop. But he surely would never have removed his hat to Misthress Mahan again if he had heard that she had a privy inside her house.

He must have been impressed by the stories of people who had windmills. The Burwells, Wichita bankers, had bought the farm

next south of ours, and had erected a windmill out in the pasture, to provide water for the livestock that roamed at large there. This was a wooden structure throughout, wooden tower, wheel of wood slats, and vane of similar construction. It seemed to work automatically, for nobody ever attended to its wants.

Beside the Burwell windmill was a water tank. When the pump ran day and night, the tank overflowed into a gully. When the wind was light or there were days of calm, the cattle drank up the stored water and waited for wind.

This seemed a simple system, as compared with that in use on our farm. For our hundreds of head of livestock, all the water had to be pumped by hand. As soon as Van and I were old enough to lift a pump handle, we were put at this monotonous work. From that time on, there was little consideration for the water problem. Boypower was cheap and fairly dependable. You just went about your business and forgot it, as you did with the windmill in Burwell's pasture. If the boys weren't pumping they probably would be playing, or wasting their time in some equally reprehensible manner.

Van and I divided the pumping job by strokes. He would do 500 strokes, then I would take over and do the next 500. We kept track of the hundreds by a system of marks made with a nail on the tank or adjacent fence. Neither doubted the integrity of the other's accounting.

Sometimes Dad would relieve us at the pumps. On Sundays in summer it was his custom to spend all the time while the family was at church, steadily pumping. By noon he would have the horse trough, cattle tank and hog troughs filled. Sunday was a great fresh water day for our animals. On most other days they suffered somewhat from thirst and fought for position around the troughs.

One of the worst features of the pumping was that the big tank in the cattle corral always leaked, but leaked most in hot, dry weather, when the animals were thirstiest. This tank was shaped like half of a huge barrel that had been split down the middle vertically. It was made of two-inch planking, fastened with heavy iron hoops, bolted to four-by-four crosspieces that went across the

open side of the tank. I have no idea how many gallons it held, having no eye for such estimation, but I should say that you could have sailed it in deep water with a crew of five, a jury mast, jibboom and outboard motor.

In summer heat the iron hoops would expand and the dry planks would contract. The precious water that cost so much tiresome labor would spout through the cracks between the planks as fast as you could produce it. The only way to convince the Boss that you had not been shirking was to create a great mudpuddle around the tank. This was slow business, as the earth was thirsty, too, and drank up the water almost as fast as supplied. In the course of a week's pumping, you might produce a puddle twenty feet wide, but what of it? Himself would not be impressed. That puddle represented no cost. Merely wasted boypower, which was charged off as surplus energy.

Billy Holloway, a quiet Irishman who worked as salesman for the farm implement firm of F. G. Smythe & Son, where Dad bought his farm machinery, had been trying for years to sell a windmill to his good customer from south of town. Big Flurry couldn't see the sense in spending so much money for pumping that he was now getting done free of charge. Billy knew the right arguments, or worked them out for himself through the years. He made the sale.

It was an off-brand windmill. I never saw another of the same make. Billy Holloway explained that the thing was being manufactured experimentally in Kansas City, and was bound to be a great success. But because it was not presently recognized as a popular article, it might be had at a great bargain. Mr. Smythe had only three to sell at this introductory bargain price.

The mill (more properly a wind engine) consisted of a wheel with slats set to catch the wind, a flat vane to keep the wheel facing into the wind, and simple machinery for transmitting power to an up-and-down plunger, which was to operate the pump. One of the simplest forms of engines.

This machine was entirely of steel, painted red. It called for a strong force pump, painted green, and a tower upon which to

mount the wheel and vane, so as to get them up where the winds blow freely. Dad hired a good carpenter, skilled in tower work, to help him with construction of the four-legged, forty-foot, well-braced tower. It was built on the ground and hoisted into place with block and tackle attached to neighboring trees. Nice calculations, for country folk, had to be made to make the job work out just right. There were no missteps. The wind-engine was mounted atop its tower, the handle of the pump detached, and—so we believed—our days of pumping were over. Henceforth, the wind would do it for us. In Kansas, the wind has few days off.

The sleepers to which the tower was bolted went deep into the earth. They were a foot square, of the most solid and flawless oak, and treated with many coats of tar. The tower itself was a model of sturdy timber construction. It was never painted. Big Flurry considered paint a vanyitty, used chiefly for show.

Mother was not altogether pleased with the windmill planning. Water would be no closer to the house than it had been for years. Couldn't the tower be built beside the house, or even directly over a corner of the porch, so that water could be delivered into the kitchen? Were only the cattle to be considered in the vast new development? What about the women? What did it matter to them that the wind was now to raise the water, instead of the boys? If we couldn't have a gravity tank to furnish water under pressure, couldn't we at least have the same service the cattle and hogs were going to have?

Big Flurry remained silent, except to point out, in cryptic sentences, that he had no intention of murdering his family. If the wheel should fall off that tower in a windstorm, would it be better to have it fall in the yard, or have it crash through the roof and kill the sleeping children?

For physical convenience, the Old Man worked out an extensive engineering scheme. The windmill was situated a few yards south-east of the house. Directly east of it was mounted a twelve-foot trough for horses. All water pumped by the windmill was to flow first into this trough. At a distance six inches from the top of the trough, a pipe-line led out, down, and 500 feet eastward to the cattle tank in the low-lying corral.

Many years earlier, Big Flurry had bought at a salvage sale a few wagonloads of two-inch gas pipe. Now he would make use of some of it.

Most of an autumn season was spent in digging the trench and laying the pipe. At the first test, the slant, rate of flow and other details proved the Old Man's mental calculations to have been without error.

Now, another outlet in the horse trough was made on the north side, at the same level, and another line of pipe was laid, leading under the south porch, through the cellar wall, into the cellar.

Here was built with the Old Man's own hands and tools, a long, shallow trough, similar to a flat-bottomed boat. Big Flurry had built many a boat in Ireland. This trough, some years later, actually was navigated as an emergency boat in a great flood. It was thoroughly seaworthy.

The boat, or trough, was mounted against the south wall of the cellar, at convenient height from the ground, with the pipe from the horse trough leading into it. An overflow pipe ran from its north side, under the cellar floor, through the north wall of the cellar, through the hundred feet of the hill in front of the house, and discharged upon a lawn of an acre, sown to red clover.

It was, all in all, a magnificent and complicated engineering scheme. It took many weeks of back-breaking labor to carry it out. But, once the windmill got going, horses would drink from a clear, flowing supply beside the tower, cattle and hogs would luxuriate in abundance of water down below, and cold water would be available at all times for cooling milk, cream, and butter, in the cellar. The intake and outlet in the big boat in the cellar were arranged so that the cold water would reach just up to the rims around the one-gallon milk crocks.

On the first day, the windmill didn't pump any water to speak of. The wind was not exactly strong. Only a feeble stream poured from the pump for a few seconds at a time. We had to hitch the handle back on the pump and go to work at the old business.

After a week, we found that the windmill had pumped hardly enough water to supply the birds that got free refreshments from the edge of the horse trough. Big Flurry went to town and had

a talk with Billy Holloway. Two windmill experts appeared at the farm in a sleek livery stable outfit, and said the solution was simple. Three large trees were stealing the breeze. They would have to be topped, after which the wheel would go around like nobody's business.

The trees were topped, much as Big Flurry hated to cut down the growth he had nourished through so many years.

Then arose a stiff breeze. The wheel started whirling. The pump delivered a fairly regular, though small, stream.

That night the wheel came off its axle and crashed to the yard, forty feet below. The Old Man did not need to point any moral. It was obvious that the wheel would have plunged through the roof and floors, killing and maiming, if the tower had been built above the back porch.

Next day the battered wheel was loaded upon a wagon and hauled to a blacksmith in Wichita. The windmill experts were consulted. They made certain recommendations. While the wheel was being straightened out the vane was having a piece of sheet iron added to it to give it more surface to catch the wind and govern the wheel.

The Old Man was silent while the alterations and repairs were being made and the wind-engine remounted. Now, at long last, we could relax and let the wind work for us.

Performance fell short. On a windy day, the machine delivered some water. Never enough for current needs. Still, after coming home from school, we boys had to unhook the pump handle, perhaps for hours, possibly for only an hour or so.

We had decided that the windmill, for some reason that baffled Big Flurry and Mr. Smythe's experts, was a failure, when a great wind came howling and roaring out of the southwest one spring night. The mill was locked out of gear before we went to bed that night, to keep it from tearing itself to pieces.

Toward morning there was a great crash. The steel wheel was draped over the apex of the tower next morning. The converging angle-timbers had speared it nicely through the center as it had attempted its second plunge to earth. It was hopelessly wrecked. As



the wind died, you could hear its metallic voice, bong-bong, bong-bong, sadly celebrating the passing of a great experiment.

For many nights the nicely balanced wheel kept up its lugubrious dirge, keeping all the family awake.

Then Big Flurry, when the wind died down, climbed the tower and lashed all fast with heavy manila rope. He removed the vane and lowered it to the ground. It was placed atop a pile of timbers under the sycamore trees, where it lay for years.

The great steel wheel floundered in every breeze, pounded out a depressing symphony in each recurring storm. We learned to go to sleep to the sad disharmony of its bong-bong, whong-whong, long-long.

We looked up at the flopping monstrosity, year after year, wondering when it would come loose and fall upon its victim.

*Life was a puzzle indeed.*

*Where were we going, whither drifting, and what were we going to accomplish?*

*Van and I were not mutually understanding enough to discuss our situation and try to arrive at some kind of solution. He had his answer. He would run away from home; chuck it all. But not just yet.*

*I was a little younger, and not made of such stern stuff. I wanted to stay and do what could be done to take care of Mother. Yet, I dared not so much as protest to Dad against his high hell-raising.*

*I devoted a good deal of time to prayer. Sometimes I would sit in the house and talk with Mother, trying to comfort her and help her make plans about getting rid of the Old Man. Her responses were erratic, uneven, indecisive. Indeed, in the circumstances, who could answer clearly?*

*So, appetite gone and nerves on edge, we leaned on God and John.*

## 24

JOHN landed a job as bookkeeper at the Mahan Supply Co., through friendship of Johnny and Tommie Mahan, proprietors of the largest wholesale liquor business in Wichita. This was shortly before the appearance of Carry A. Nation upon the prohibition scene, and the liquor business, wholesale and retail, was permitted to operate prosperously, by amicable arrangements with the city authorities. The generally adopted compromise with prohibition included a whole category of polite law evasions.

There were five major wholesale liquor and beer houses in Wichita. They conducted their business in the open, without exactly flaunting their wares before the church folk. The Mahans, Polks, Gettos and Schnitzlers, each had the exclusive agency for some nationally advertised beer, and handled good whiskey. We never learned the amount of blackmail that was levied upon these houses by the police and political fathers of the town. It was common knowledge, however, that each wholesale house owned most of the saloons that sold its goods, and that each saloon paid its regular "fine" monthly. The wholesale houses were liberal advertisers in the newspapers, in all kinds of amateur journals and programs, and wherever a worthy cause appealed. They advertised their names only, and did not attempt to popularize their wares.

The Mahan Supply Co. had headquarters in a clutter of brick and frame warehouses and yards on Douglas avenue, facing the railroad tracks. A siding ran into the warehouse sheds, for convenience in unloading carloads of beer and whiskey.

John sat on a stool behind a grilled window in the office, one step off the sidewalk on Douglas avenue. He kept the books and the cash. Both Johnny and Tommie were consuming generous

quantities of their own products, and frequently called upon John for handfuls of cash with which to conduct tours of their various saloons. John gravely handed out the money, made notations, and went on with his double-entry bookkeeping in his beautiful business handwriting.

The pay here was better than in the professorial business, although it was not munificent. John was able to begin buying elegant neckties out of his own pay. He engaged the best tailor in town to design and fashion his suits, and he had his shirts made to order out of pure linen. He still wore no hat except the Dunlap derby at \$5. The Mr. Cook who sold him his hats suggested that a gentleman should have at least four of them a year, so four it was.

During this period it was customary for me to drive into town so as to pick up John at noon each Saturday, and bring him to the farm for the week end. These were dreary trips. John seldom spoke, except to inquire, as we reached the edge of town, "How is Mother?"

"She's not very well," was the invariable answer.

"Has the Old Man been raising hell?"

"Yes, he's been pretty bad this week."

John would munch thoughtfully and noisily at the candy or peanuts that he carried in his overcoat pocket. He rarely offered me a bite, but consumed the whole bagful himself on the way home, seemingly so steeped in contemplation that it never occurred to him that the little brother was hungry for sweets and peanuts.

As we neared the Arkansas River bridge, John would have finished his bag of candy or peanuts, and would begin to clean his teeth by the simple process of sucking air through all the crevices, with a loud, siren-like sound.

At a distance of about half a mile from the farm, he might utter the first words since the preliminary inquiries of an hour before.

"I may have to run the Old Man off the farm. We can't allow him to kill Mother or drive her crazy."

I would say, "Well, I think he's crazy already, the way he acts. And Mother worries so much all the time that I'm afraid she's going crazy too."

Marie was living in her own home now. Margaret was away,

teaching school. John was away all week. The Old Man wasn't afraid of the younger children. He carried on a wild war of roaring, stamping, cursing and bellowing about the half a pound of taw. Mother was growing visibly paler, more nervous, more thoughtful.

More and more often now, I came upon her in the parlor, looking at the crayon enlargements of Stephen and Katie, her lips moving or quietly smiling. Her comfort in her troubles seemed to center around the dead children and Poor John. During the brief weekend stay of John, her spirits improved, and she talked almost gaily. When I took John in to vespers on Sunday evening, and drove home without him, I knew I was sure to find Mother in tears, or in a deep brown study.

John brought a touch of city life, of activity in a strange, foreign world. He was going to the theater at least once a week now. Mahans got plenty of complimentary tickets to the shows at the Crawford Grand Opera House, because they advertised on the curtain and in the programs. They also permitted show ads to be posted in the windows of the wholesale house and all their saloons. Johnny Mahan allotted good tickets to John each week. Most road shows played only one night, and John saw all the best of them.

In glowing language, John told Mother of the terrorizing impressiveness of Lewis Morrison's "Faust." He told how Faust sold his soul to the devil, and eventually paid a terrible penalty. How the beautiful Marguerite suffered because of Faust's awful bargain, and how the devil masqueraded as a fine gentleman. My blood almost froze as John described Lewis Morrison sinking into hell in the midst of sulphurous fumes, and our indignation was hot when he told how one of the gallery gods had spoiled everything by shouting, "No use tryin', bo, hell's full!"

There was a restrained account of "Under the Red Robe," and gay description of Hoyt's "A Texas Steer," and "The County Chairman." John was becoming citified in his point of view, too. He said he did not believe that all actresses were immoral. Some of these great stars were the wives of the distinguished actors who played the leads, and many were so innocently beautiful that one would know at first glance that they could not be guilty of any immorality,

any more than one's own sister. To be sure, there were actresses who rode in hacks with drummers, and these were obviously the scum of the earth. Yet drummers themselves, separated from the evil influences of the show girls, were genial fellows, good conversationalists, and full of talk about the wonders of the big cities. There was one in only last week who had seen the Flatiron Building in New York on a windy day. John looked at the floor and grinned as he made this report, but went into no further detail.

One of the refinements evident in John's speech since he had become a patron of the theater was that he pronounced evil in three syllables, *ee-vee-il*. I couldn't figure this one out, but John said that Lewis Morrison ought to know.

John witnessed a minstrel show every two or three weeks in season. He described for us the side-splitting comicalities of Lew Dockstader and the magnificent costumes of the minstrels under McIntyre and Heath.

In the great art of music, too, John was developing a refined taste. He had heard Gilmore's band at the Crawford, and, by chance, he happened to be at Mass with Margaret next morning, when as much of the band as could crowd into the choir loft played a Mozart High Mass. He had heard Charles Gardiner sing "Beautiful Garden of Roses," and some superb bass do "Asleep in the Deep" as a specialty number, between acts, at the Crawford.

John was eating 25-cent meals, every once in a while, at the Royal Cafe, on Main street. The Royal was owned by the Mahans too, so John got a certain reduction in prices there, and a meal ticket that was punched for each meal. We learned that a cafe (to rhyme with safe) was a superior sort of restaurant which had originated in Europe. It was magnificently furnished, and the food was served stylishly by polite colored waiters.

Once a month, John helped Father Tihen take up the collection. Because he was an outstanding penman and accountant, he shone before the entire congregation. Father Tihen passed the collection basket in person, dressed in a black cassock. John walked along beside the pastor, taking down in a small ledger the names of the contributors and the amounts.

Next month, a printed list of contributors to the coal collection would be handed out, with the amount opposite the name of each.

John also contributed one night each week to keeping the books of the Pro-Cathedral for Father Tihen. He straightened out the badly kept accounts when he was called in, and patiently worked by night, after a full day's work, at the job of regularizing the parish affairs.

Big Flurry usually kept away from the house while John was home on week ends. If he happened to eat at the same table, there was solemn silence, broken only by the Old Man's sipping his coffee from the saucer or John's clearing his teeth of food.

As soon as John departed, the Boss was likely to start kicking up some sort of row.

Marie, driving from her home to her old home once a week or so for a visit, found Mother in a constantly declining state of health, beset by worry. Mother would tell Marie her troubles more unreservedly than she would tell them to anybody else.

Once Marie went to the stable to talk to Dad about the situation.

"I'm worried about Mother," she said. "She is worried and nervous and sick. What's the matter?"

"Great God, Manie-gaarl," answered the Old Man, wide-eyed with astonishment, "how should I know what's the matter with your mother? She tells me nothing these many years, and I think she's been out of her mind this long while, allay."

"Well, I hope everybody treats her well and is nice to her, because if they don't she's going to die soon."

"Sure, 'tis thruth for you, gaarl! I'm living in tarment, and I wisht I was in hell! All I want is to get away to Ireland and I'll harm nobody."

There was not much satisfaction to be got out of this interview, and the Old Man was just as tough after Marie left as he had been before.

When I went to school in the morning, I went unwillingly and in fear that the Old Man would kill Mother while we were all away. I often offered to stay home, but Mother sent me off, saying

that Himself was afraid to kill anybody, and only wanted to scare us all to death. I would walk the mile and a half to school, praying that God would not let Himself kill or harm Mother, and would sit all day in my seat, inattentive to the lessons, worrying. I would run home, often crying part of the way, and burst in the back door with the old query, "Has the Old Man been acting up?"

One Sunday, when Mother was in a particularly low state, unable to rise from bed, John, dressed in his town clothes, black suit, white linen shirt, wing collar and detachable cuffs, walked down to the stable, where Dad was currying the horses. One foot on the string-piece that crossed the doorway, he began:

"Dad, I want to have a talk with you."

"Hay?" shouted the Old Man, currycomb and brush suspended in the air.

"I just came here to tell you that you've got to stop raising hell around here."

"Hay? Say that agin, Professor."

"I say you're killing Mother with your hell-raising, and the family is not going to stand for it any longer."

"Aye? What then, Lawyer?"

"Well, if you can't behave yourself, you'll have to leave here, that's all. If you don't get out of here and let Mother alone, we'll have to put you in jail."

"Aye? Do you hear him, God? The Lawyer is talking to his father! He tells me I must lave here! Him that can't put a harness on a harse! He comes with his piccadillies on, and his cuffs rattling like a hailstorm itself, and tells his father to lave here! Sthrike him dead, God! Why in hell don't you sthrike him dead?"

John came back to the house, pale and trembling, but satisfied that he had done his duty thus far.

The Old Man was silent at home for many days after the ultimatum of John. But it was evident that trouble was brewing. Himself made many trips to town, and word drifted back from one source and another that he was relating his troubles to Fred Ross and Pat Gould and Gus Sauer and McGowan, and receiving the sympathy and advice of each of them. He was working out a scheme



for his liberation with his friends. He was talking to Pat Whaley about the cost of a ticket to Ireland, the price of land in West Cork, and the lowest boarding-house rates in Wichita and New York.

His customary approach to the subject was, "Well, Gus, me big Lawyer of a son that I spent all me money on, tells me that I must LAVE HERE!"

The last two words were shouted with a sudden explosion of breath, such as a good British sailor might use in crying, "God save the King!"

The Old Man got plenty of sympathy. The fact that Mother and the children had been careful never to intimate to any stranger that there was anything wrong at home now militated against the family and in favor of the Old Man. Everybody knew that Big Flurry was a hard worker and an honest man, and even the intimate friends of the family had him sized up as a generous and kind father and husband, albeit a bit peculiar and alien. The neighboring farmers mostly believed that John and the family had gone high-hat on the Old Man and were trying to get rid of him so that they might waste his substance in riotous living.

One evening, Himself was sitting by the kitchen stove, brooding mightily, as usual. Mother was going about the after-supper work, washing dishes, putting them away in the pantry, setting bread for tomorrow. She was in the center of the big kitchen floor, holding a glass sugar bowl in her hands, when Himself, silent for two weeks, suddenly stamped both feet on the floor and roared:

"Wooman!"

Mother stopped in her tracks, turned white, and dropped the bowl. She stood as if transfixed, unable to stoop and pick up the pieces. She faced her husband.

After a dramatic pause, Big Flurry shouted:

"Get me a tousand dollars before this time tomarra night and I'll LAVE HERE!"

He jumped to his feet and stamped out.

Mother gathered up the fragments of the dish with trembling fingers. I made anxious inquiries.

"He's just trying to scare us," she said.

*Even at this distance of years and space, I don't see what we young children could have done to avert the approaching catastrophe.*

*Sometimes I have thought that what the Old Man needed was a jester in the family.*

*One day he fell on his knees in the middle of the kitchen, impeding Mother's progress across the floor, and, with the gesture that he loved, one hand holding his hat and the other raised on high, he shouted:*

*"Me galdy, galdy, bitther curse attind the day I crossed your path!"*

*This was intoned, the emphasis being upon bitther and attind.*

*There had been no argument for days. Only dire silence. When he had finished his drama, the Old Man departed, leaving all of us shaking with fear.*

*Fear of what? We didn't know.*

*If one of us boys had been a few years older, say 17 or 18, it might have saved the situation if we had laughed aloud and said, "Good theater! But what do you mean by all that, Dad? What good does it do to curse a day that has long passed into oblivion? Will the day mind? Will anybody give a damn? Come on now, be sensible, and let's all have a drink!"*

*But to us it was serious, tragic business, and nobody thought of laughing.*

## 25

WE WERE all asleep, on a wintry midnight, when there came a knocking at the kitchen door. Mother, in the big bed, and I, in the little bed in the corner, awoke and listened. Our east window opened upon the roof of the back porch. We could hear the stamping and breathing of a team of horses in the east yard.

When the knock had been repeated several times, we heard Big Flurry stirring from his little bedroom off the kitchen.

The back door opened, and we heard:

"Is this Flurry Driscoll?"

"Yes sir."

"Well, well, well! How are you, Flurry?"

"A-a-a-a, well, thank God."

"Flurry, this is Alec Burke of Chicago."

"Aye. And what of that?"

"Alec Burke of Chicago I am. I came all the way from Wishita with a livery team and a driver to see you."

"Aye. And what of that?"

Alec began a bewildered conversation about old times. He spoke in a high, piping soprano. Nobody, once hearing the voice and the brogue, could mistake it.

Mother said to me, "I must get dressed and go downstairs. This is old Alec Burke. He is one of Himself's old cronies from Erie and Ireland. But Himself has had a drink too much, I suppose, and he doesn't know what is going on. We're in for trouble now, for sure. This Burke is an old blow-hard and a blatherskite. Many years ago, he was a trouble-maker. He will make Himself feel sorry for himself, and he'll be worse than Uncle Jim."

"But I can't have a visitor turned away from the back door in the middle of the night. That would be a disgrace. I must go down and invite him in."

While she was talking, she was dressing. She descended to the kitchen, where Dad was still parleying with the stranger, not even inviting him to come in.

Mother took charge of the situation, invited Alec to come in, insisted upon his spending the night, at least, and asked Big Flurry to go out and dismiss the driver and rig.

"Flurry sleeps so soundly, I'm sure he isn't altogether awake yet, Mr. Burke," she said. "He'll be glad I came down to help him out when he wakes up."

This fiction was maintained throughout the Burke visit, as explanation for the inhospitality of the first few minutes. Big Flurry fell in with it at once. He had collected his wits by the time he had dismissed the driver, and immediately began to make apologies. Burke was taken to the dining room and the fire was replenished.

Mother and Dad did not get to bed until three in the morning. Meantime, they had disposed the honored guest in the spare bed left vacant by departure of Margaret and Marie.

I had been wide awake, listening to the conversation in the room below. It was all friendly, reminiscent, exploratory.

Burke stayed a week. His conversation was mostly about himself and his money, how extremely wealthy he had become in the brick business, how he ruled his household with a rod of iron and made his servants tremble for fear of his wrath. He was a fat man of medium height, well-tailored, smug, speaking with a brogue that you could brush your hair with.

He related with pride how he had humiliated relatives, brought over from Ireland, by rebuking them for their behavior in public, always concluding with the admonition, "'Tis not in the bogs ye are now, at all, at all, but in the gr-e-a-a-t City of Chicago!"

He loved the city that had made him rich. He boasted about it as though he had built it himself. He had a special chant for "the gr-e-a-a-t City of Chicago," drawing out the "great" and sliding up and down the scale in handsome fashion. He went among the

livestock with his old sailing companion, Big Flurry, asked questions about the family income and financial standing, and made no secret of the fact that he considered his shipmate a fool for "slaving away in this desolate counthry, instead of making money in the gr-e-a-a-t City of Chicago."

He soon had Big Flurry's story of discontent, of futility, of frustration. He tried to act as mediator, to compose the differences between the warring partners, but was baffled by the way in which old grievances were constantly being brought up in the discussions. There was the half a pound of tea, and there was the time Big Flurry had choked his wife because she couldn't clean a fish properly. Old scores, old sores. There was little or no talk about anything recent or current.

Each side to the controversy consulted the wise Alec separately, and then there would be family councils where Alec would try to draw out both sides. Mother maintained that there was no quarrel; it was merely that Himself was discontented with America and abused his family in consequence.

"Ah, sure, it takes two to fight!" was the mediator's comment on this picture.

When reconciliation seemed hopeless, he gave forth this pearl of wisdom:

"It's aisy to start a fire, but it's damn hard to quench it."

In between family councils and listening to family stories, Alec whetted Big Flurry's appetite for the auld sod by singing a song he had heard Chauncey Olcott sing. Alec was a ridiculous singer, his high voice cracking and going up into registers where it was completely lost. This was the refrain of the song:

'Tis a handful of airth  
From the land of me bairth,  
From the grave where me dear mother lies.

Dad made Burke sing it again and again, the while he sat with his head in his hands, his eyes moist. Burke told how the stage singer had tears running down his cheeks as he sang, a handful of earth slipping through his fingers.

That night Mother said to me, "What did I tell you about Burke! He is making the Old Man worse than ever. Himself will be singing about his poor mother's grave now, and God knows that he and his brothers were mean to her when she was old and a cripple."

One day Mother drove Alec over the hills to Margaret's school. The Chicago Irishman created a sensation among the poor farm children by sowing money broadcast in the yard and fields. The older children nearly killed the younger ones in the rush for dimes, quarters, and half dollars which the proud Irishman tossed away by the handful. He then demanded that Margaret dismiss school for the day in his honor.

No indeed! He had the wrong schoolma'am for that kind of program. She was hired to teach so many days a month, and she was going to earn her money. Alec compromised by making a speech to the bewildered urchins, who couldn't understand anything he said. He told them to leave this God-forsaken prairie country and make their fortunes in the gr-e-a-a-t City of Chicago. The children laughed, clapped their hands, and called for more money-throwing.

Returning to the farm, Burke reported his impressions of the Kansans. "Ah, God in heaven, 'tis a desolate counthry altogether entirely! The poor childhren look starved ourself. 'Tis a wondher before God that their parents don't have sense enough to move out of such dhreary land to the gr-e-a-a-t City of Chicago. They couldn't be worse off there, and they might have a chance to sell papers on the sthreeets."

Alec regaled us with stories of the management of his home. His wife made all his underclothes, he said, and showed us exhibits of well-made, but obviously home-made long woolens. His wife did not need to think that, because her husband was rich, she should be idle.

He told us how he had disciplined his son when the son had brought his girl home to introduce to his parents. Alec called the girl to him and asked:

"Are you this bye's gaarl, I don't know?"

The young lady, much confused, blushed, giggled, and said that

she and the boy had been going around together for some time. Meantime, the son was melting in embarrassment and confusion, thinking that his tyrant father was sure to break up his love affair.

"Well, if you're thinking about marrying my son for his money, you best give up the notion right away," proceeded the benevolent papa. "If you think you'll be rich because you're marrying a rich man's son, get the idea out of your pretty little head. This bye has been going to school all his life. He hasn't got enough income to feed a canary bird. I started with nothing, in my bare feet, and he is lucky to have a rich father to send him to school. He wants to be a lawyer, and I can afford to buy him all the education in the gr-e-a-a-t City of Chicago. But he must support himself when he leaves this roof. So run on now and sing your foolish little songs."

Alec was doubtful as to how much good this practical lecture had done. He suspected all young people, all poor people, and all Americans of being too light-headed and foolish to attend to their most elemental affairs. Priests he tolerated as laborers in a non-essential industry. They were altogether too much educated, used up too much of other people's money, and deserved a good, practical talking-to once in a while.

He gave us samples of the lectures he had delivered to priests and bishops, along with his contributions toward the parish church and the Holy Name Cathedral. It must have taken a lot of Christian fortitude to take that kind of instruction for the sake of a little financial support. Or possibly the clergy had a sense of humor.

I had learned to enjoy the presence, conversation and personality of our wealthy guest. At least, he was a personage from another world. While he was in our midst, the Old Man was not raising hell. Family troubles were discussed, yes, but in a more sane and sensible manner than heretofore. There was no roaring, shouting, and thundering about the half a pound of tea. A different kind of person had come in out of the void. I didn't know how to classify him, but I looked upon his expensive overcoat and tailored suit with wonder.

Mother told me that Alec Burke was a purse-proud Irishman, than which there is nothing more insufferable under the sun and

moon. All the people of Ireland were poor, she explained, and not through any fault of their own. Their homes and means of living had been taken from them by a foreign invader. They were ignorant, in a scholastic sense. This too, was no shame to them, because their ruthless conquerors had forbidden them education in a vain effort to make the conquest permanent.

But good, decent Irishmen were humble in the sight of God, wherever they went and whether they were rich or poor. This man made money his god, and put on airs because he had lots of it. He didn't even know how to put on airs, but made a fool of himself before self-respecting Kansans.

Alec organized a series of games and races with me, offering cash prizes for the winner. One afternoon I won a total of six dollars. That was far more money than I had ever had before. I was planning to buy a new scrapbook for a dollar and subscribe for a city newspaper, to get material to paste into the book.

When Mother heard about this, she said, "You must give him back every cent of it. He thinks we are poor, and he is trying to buy our hospitality. We do not run a boarding-house. You know you would not like to see me as a paid waitress or laundress. I'll wash his shirts and iron them, but I would throw his money in his face if he offered any of it to me, and he knows it. So he tries to pay his board by giving money to you. Be polite when you give it back, and just tell him that you know your parents would not permit you to take six dollars from any guest."

Dad said nothing about the money transaction, but was obviously relieved when he heard me return the cash. Alec accepted it silently. As he dropped the silver dollars into his deep pocket, he murmured, "God help us!"

Big Flurry seemed altogether unimpressed by his old shipmate's boasting of wealth and political power in Chicago. He listened without changing expression. His comments were usually, "Aye, aye! Indadel! 'Tis so! Thruth for you! Hay! Look at that now!"

Any Irishman may inject these small words into the conversation without meaning anything at all. They are noncommittal indications that the polite host is listening.



Alec had one concrete proposition as a solution to our family troubles.

"Let ye sell this barren farm," he said. "Then, in the Name of God, let ye say goodbye to these desolate prairies and this God-forsaken town of Wishita, and move, bag and baggage, to the gr-e-a-a-t City of Chicago.

"I'll get ye a grocery store in some good Irish neighborhood. I don't know why anybody would want this farm, but I suppose there are them alive that would pay money for it, God forgive them. Ye will have enough money to start your store, and if ye need more, I will lend it to ye at six percent.

"John, that keeps such beautiful books, should be able to take care of all the accounts. 'Tis a big enough family to run the store without hiring any help. The byes would do well delivering the groceries and waiting on the customers. Ellen wants to be living in church, so ye could get a place close to a big one, where she could pray ye all into prosperity ourself.

"Flurry could go back to Ireland for his visit, and 'tis himself won't want to be staying there at all, like he thinks. Sure, nobody would live in the bogs at all, at all, if he had a chance to live in the gr-e-a-a-t City of Chicago. When Flurry comes back he can take charge of the business. In the meantime, John that is so smart could run it.

"These byes do be talking about the education they wants. 'Tis aisy to overdo it. Let them learn their catechism and how to add up a good bill of groceries, and to hell with the colleges."

This proposition was well meant, but it did not appear to interest anybody.

Dad said, mockingly, "Aye, 'tis a fine scheme, Alec, and 'tis like you to be offering to lend us money. The Professor could make all the ovals they'd need, and me in Ireland. He can't put a harness on a harse, but I suppose he could kape the coal-ile out of the butther ourself. Still and all, 'tis not the Professor would be damning his soul with a pound of lard to this one and a sack of sugar to that one. Sure, Alec, when the Lawyer was in the Business College, didn't he sell and buy carloads of harse manure every day and never

a smell of it did he smell! They has akshull business in them places, where they buys and sells like the naygar on the Ashtabula docks, and they uses red and green cards for money because they don't have to earn that kind of money at all, at all. Oh, 'tis a fine wurruld the Lawyer lives in, and 'twould be a shame before God to put him behind a counther to sell molasses for regular money."

Mother ignored the Chicago proposition politely. Privately she told me that she would never sign a deed to sell the farm, lest Himself take all or most of the proceeds and decamp to Ireland. As for making a Chicago grocer out of Big Flurry, she considered that a preposterous idea. To amuse her in her hours of depression, I made up skits depicting the Driscoll family in the grocery trade, with Dad throwing hams and cans of coffee at us and driving customers out of the store with tales of his troubles. Mother often laughed until she cried at these zany performances.

Burke went about his business in the West, saying he would stop by on his return to see whether we had straightened everything out.

On his return trip, he did spend a day and a night with us. By this time the talk of Big Flurry's departure had become so far advanced that John had entered the council with a scheme to borrow from Alec Burke whatever money would be required for a settlement, giving him a mortgage on the farm at six percent.

The brick man turned down this proposition promptly.

"I want no dealings with the fatherless," he said. "The farm is good for the mortgage and far more. Let ye go to any mortgage company and get what ye need. Yes, I suppose ye can pay it off in a couple of years, like ye say. But suppose some thrubble comes upon ye, like sickness or death or drought. Then I wouldn't get my intherest, and I would be the worst in the wurruld if I foreclosed on ye. No, I'll have nothing to do with it, in the Name of God."

He went away in a cold, biting sleet storm, and with him went a certain magic atmosphere of the great city.



*I often wonder whether couples that separate in these days carry it all off as politely and happily as they sometimes pretend to do.*

*I wonder whether their sons of fourteen or fifteen would agree when they might hear them say, "Oh, we just agreed to disagree! But we'll always be the best of friends."*

*It wasn't that way in our family.*

*Still, we were old-fashioned. And, too, the quarreling couple had been married some forty years, and had had a large family. They had stood together while life ebbed from the bodies they had nourished. They had stood side by side at the graves.*

*Perhaps it isn't as easy in such a case as it may be for Hollywood people.*

*I tried to discover how they felt about it. I tried to see whether I could think of any way of reconciling them.*

*But, try as I might, I never could discover what they were really fighting about. Certainly not about a half a pound of tea.*

*I did get the feeling that the Old Man was lonely. He had made one great venture in life, a break from his native soil, for freedom. He had not found freedom, but frustration and sorrow.*

*So, I was just beginning to understand that the Old Man might have a grievance too, when everything blew up.*

JOHN lost his job at the Mahan Supply Company. None of the family except Mother ever heard how it happened. We knew merely that John came walking home one day, in the middle of the week, had a long talk with Mother, and didn't go back. The word was given out that John had resigned the job as not of sufficient importance for his talents. He probably would go back to business college work, where his talents were appreciated, sometime soon.

There had been some sort of mixup at the warehouse. A fat, stupid brother-in-law of the Mahans, named Billy Myers, who spoke with a strong German accent, had something to do with John's severance from the payroll. We never learned just what the trouble was, but we did hear that Billy was so soundly beaten up by one of the beer-wagon drivers, in connection with the incident, that he was sent to hospital, where he remained for a long time. John was able to dismiss the whole affair cavalierly and to take his unemployment as a blessed rest period, but Billy, who caused him to be fired, was never again a well man.

John said that he was glad to be away from the atmosphere of booze. It was an evil traffic. Of late, the Mahans had mortgaged many of their city lots to buy a whole trainload of Kentucky bourbon, so as to forestall rising prices and make a big killing. Many thousands of dollars were involved. The trainload of whiskey, in 57-gallon barrels, was piled in the warehouse and adjacent yards, under constant guard.

The whiskey was being doctored by the Mahans before being sold to the trade. It was fine goods, aged in the wood. In the warehouse, under supervision of Billy Myers, two barrels were being

stretched into three barrels by admixture of glycerin, alcohol, water, and a bit of caramel. It was the technique used in prohibition New York, many years later. It meant big money in the bank for the Mahans.

There was a faint intimation that John had protested against this stretching of the goods as unorthodox practice, and had been in collision with Myers on account of his protest. Whether this was the occasion of John's departure, we did not learn positively. But it did appear that the driver had beaten Billy up because he considered that John had not had a square deal.

Because John was a total abstainer, it had been discovered that he was an expert whiskey taster. He tasted samples of various blends, spitting the liquor out into a big brass spittoon in the office. He could detect the slightest tampering with the original, wood-aged bourbon. He told which was better, which hardest to detect. Thus he had become useful in a commerce which he detested.

There was no break in the friendship of the Mahan families and the Driscolls. The animosity was directed entirely toward Billy Myers, whose wife was a sister of Johnny Mahan's wife.

John dawdled about the house and yard for a week or so, dressed in neatly pressed city trousers, leather belt, and pongee shirt, open at the neck. Himself was getting into his spring work, and looked sidewise at the Professor when he passed him, but said no word.

John and his father had not exchanged a word since the stable scene, where the son had told the father that if he didn't stop raising hell he would have to LAVE HERE.

John created a job for himself. The house was sadly in need of paint. Now that he had time on his hands, John would paint the house. It hadn't been painted since the original coat of white lead had been applied immediately after construction. That coat had peeled off under assaults of weather and time. The entire house, but particularly the original wing, looked shabby. Many shingles had been knocked loose by hail storms. Woodpeckers had made round holes in the north end of the attic. North and south porches were getting shaky.

John would correct all this. It looked to be a good blackberry season. The butter-and-eggs division of the farm was producing well. Mother would furnish the money and John would do the work.

As soon as spring began to green up the maple trees around the house, John rented a shotgun and bought some shells. Sitting on the north porch or in a chair on the lawn, he watched for woodpeckers, drinking lemonade the while. He was tastefully dressed in blue trousers and yellow shirt.

In one week the four woodpeckers had been shot dead. John was modest about his marksmanship. He explained that he had been handicapped by his unwillingness to shoot toward the house, and had had to catch the birds on the wing or in the maple trees.

John spent a week visiting paint stores in Wichita, testing samples, getting expert advice on the painting of a neglected house, and watching housepainters at work. Out of the first few pounds of butter he bought putty knives, scrapers, putty, and materials for ladders. He brought home many paint samples. The entire family, excluding Big Flurry, scanned the samples. It was decided to use a light yellow, with moss-green trim. A half-bushel of brushes of various sizes was bought.

Oats and potatoes had been planted and the weeds were getting obnoxious by the time John had built his two ladders. One was long enough for work on the kitchen and the lower story of the main wing. The other, which was almost too heavy for one man to handle, reached clear up to the gable end of the main wing.

John went to work, scraping the old paint off the clapboards, sandpapering rough spots, filling in cracks with putty, and repairing small defects. He whittled out plugs for the woodpecker holes, fastening them from the inside with tin plates made out of old tin cans. He spent days on the roofs, replacing shingles that were no longer useful, installing a tin collar around the main chimney, and putting things to rights generally.

When Mother's money ran low, John worked more slowly, for he needed many supplies.

The watermelons were up and beginning to spread their vines

when John had the house all clear of old paint and ready for the first new coat.

He bought packages of yellow ochre, gallons of turpentine, and spent days mixing, stirring, testing. One hot summer day he began applying the prime coat at the north gable-end of the main wing.

Big Flurry had observed the activity and comparative inactivity of his eldest son with growing indignation. No farmer would think of painting and repairing his house in the summer time, when crops had to be made and weeds had to be fought by the hour. Yet here was an able-bodied young man, dressed in town clothes, monkeying around the house while his father and little brothers worked in the fields and his mother and sister picked blackberries and made butter to supply him with money for his leisurely hobby.

The Old Man made some pointed remarks to Mother about the situation. Why did the Professor spend most of his time on the north porch, drinking lemonade, while the rest of the family labored to feed him?

Mother was noncommittal. She broached the subject to John, saying that Himself needed help in the field and thought the eldest son should lend a hand, at least occasionally. John made a few remarks, lifting his eyebrows, and went back to his lemonade. He was an expert at concocting a fine pitcher of this delicious beverage, and kept a quart or more beside him as he worked on very hot days.

In her next conversation with the Old Man, Mother explained that John did not feel that he should go to work for his father until he had been asked to do so. He did not go to work for Professor Robbins or the Mahans until asked, and he expected similar courtesy at home.

Next day, John happened to be crossing the back yard in mid-afternoon, when Big Flurry, pouring sweat, came charging in from the field to refresh himself at the pump.

As their paths crossed, Big Flurry went down on both knees in front of his astonished son, raised his hands, clasped in supplication, and roared, "Howly Jan, in Jazus' Name, will you plaze hoe some weeds out of the wathermelons?"

John's eyebrows went up radically as he stood there, somewhat



taken aback by his father's dramatic gesture. The Old Man got to his feet gracefully enough, and went about his business. John went to the granary, got a hoe, and, after spending half an hour filing and testing it, went to work on the weeds in the watermelon patch.

Next day, John was back at his housepainting job.

"His actions are unworthy of a sane man," he remarked, as he tried his brush on a plank. "They defeat the purpose for which they are intended. He does not know whereof he speaks. I will say with Saint Paul that I am glad that I am what I am. He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."

So John went on with his painting. He applied three coats of yellow ochre. The dry, neglected boards, he said, drank it up greedily. Since it was the cheapest possible paint, why not use plenty of it? July was waning, potatoes were being marketed, and the oats were in the stack, when John was ready to proceed with the color coats.

Now the entire exterior of the house was gone over with sandpaper and a dry brush. A coat of white lead came next, and then another gleaming coat of the same. The hot sun and dry weather helped greatly. When clouds banked up and rain threatened, John quit work, relaxed, studied tracts on housepainting, and drank lemonade. The Old Man raged.

A coat of yellow on the background and a coat of moss green on the trim, and the picture began to take shape. John had established credit at the paint store now, and didn't have to wait until Mother could sell enough blackberries and butter to supply current needs.

John went to town to buy lumber essential for the sketchiest repair to the porches, met Professor Robbins by appointment, and was hired for the ensuing winter. A great weight was lifted from Mother's shoulders, since it was evident that the housepainting job could not last forever. But there was cold fear, too. What would Himself do while John was in town?

All of the house got a minimum of twelve coats, and favored portions had sixteen. Porch repairs were incomplete, however, when John departed for his new teaching job in Wichita.

That winter was cold, gloomy, portentous. The Old Man spent no more time in the house than circumstances required. He rarely spoke, except when he was raving, roaring, damning his fate, recalling the half a pound of tea, and condemning his family.

When he issued an order to Van or me, it was likely to go about thus:

"Let ye go down and clean out the stable. Clean it out good, now, and bed the harses with straw. Tomarra-the-next-day ye'll be telling me, like your big lawyer of a brother did last year, that I must LAVE HERE!"

Yet there was a warm day, when the sun was shining and the ground was mellow with promise of spring, when the Old Man seemed to be at peace with his mother, the earth, again. He got out a team and started plowing on each side of the driveway that led up from the public road to the house. This drive was lined with cottonwood trees on both sides, except for those the Old Man had cut down in his futile attempt to trap Ed Blood.

He called me to come and help. He had a galvanized iron bucket nearly full of walnuts. He gave it to me, instructing me in detail how I was to drop nuts in the furrow after him.

He plowed a shallow furrow at a certain distance back of each of the rows of cottonwood trees. I was to walk the length of these two furrows, about a city block long, and drop a nut every three feet.

"Some of them will grow, and some of them won't," he explained. "We can thin them out and get the threes just where we want them. The black walnut is a slow three to grow, but it is hard and makes good chade. Charlie-bye, these walnuts will be giving cool chade to somebody when I'm far away."

Sixty-five he was, and planting slow-growing walnuts on land he was talking of leaving for the auld sod! I was young, but I thought deeply as I walked along, my bare feet relishing the living earth beneath them, about the things that must go on in an old man's head.

John had consulted Father Tihen extensively about the situation. The Old Man was getting worse, raging more and more, and Mother's health was declining. Father Tihen said that an amicable

settlement evidently was easy to make. Let the Old Man go back to Ireland, and save Mother's life. Let her get a divorce, so that a proper property settlement might be effected.

The church could not recognize a divorce, but such an instrument, under the civil law, might be the solution of the problem. There would be no thought of remarriage on either side, in any case, and the civil divorce would be merely a contractual convenience.

The Old Man, after long consultation with Pat Whaley and other cronies, had decided that he must have two thousand dollars, instead of one thousand, if he were to leave his farm forever, with no further claims upon it. John had decided that we must take a mortgage for \$2,500. What is the extra \$500 for?

"Well," said John, "for things that we need. We need a set of carriage harness, for one thing. We can't be driving up South Fourth avenue always. And there is a riding plow. A riding lister, too. There is no sense in all this walking in the fields. We can ride and do better work."

Negotiations were opened with the firm of Kibbe & Stitt, which readily agreed to issuing the mortgage on a five-years term.

Sam Amidon, the most conspicuous lawyer in town, was approached in regard to the legal settlement. He agreed fully with Father Tihen. There should be a divorce, so that there could be no cloud on the title of the property when it should descend, upon Mother's death, to the children, share and share alike.

As these negotiations proceeded, through the winter, Mother's nervous and physical condition grew worse. She had needed some sort of operation ever since the birth of the last child. The nature of this trouble was a mystery, for such matters were never discussed. However, it was evident that the poor woman's nerves were frayed, and that some physical disability was dragging her down. Time and again, she saved money for the simple operation, and even made the nightgowns and other things she would need in the hospital. But the money always had to go for other needs. The operation was postponed.

When the affliction hit her, Mother cut loose. She was no longer

afraid of Big Flurry. She wrapped a wet towel around her head and started telling everybody off. From morning until night, she scolded.

"Mother's jawing," we said to one another. We boys kept away from the house as much as possible.

Himself was quiet during these storms. Mother served his food and coffee at the table, talking almost continuously about her troubles. Much of the comment made but little sense. The Old Man looked up at her out of the corners of his eyes, and went on saucerizing his coffee.

As we went to the cornfield to gather corn for the hogs, the Old Man might say to me, "What's the matther with your mother, I don't know?"

"I don't know either."

"Well, what started her off, at all?"

"I don't know."

"I wisht I was in hell!"

The horses were sure to come in for a good beating on such a day.

Mother's trouble would result in complete exhaustion and a day or two in bed with a frightful attack of migraine. She would lie, speechless and limp, barely able to wet the cloth to put on her throbbing head from time to time. She would get up on the second or third day, weak, white, unsteady, and go about her work.

By this time, Dad's unspoken treaty of silence was abrogated. He was likely to take the warpath at any time.

The divorce was being mulled over. Amidon and the priest agreed on everything. But Mother could not bring herself to say yes to such a move. She had always considered divorce one of the final disgraces, next to suicide in its taint.

When the petition was finally drawn up, and John brought it home, Mother absolutely refused to go through with the business. It might get into the papers. And the whole world might be in the courtroom and listen to the testimony. No, we were not yet low enough to let the world in on our private troubles.

Sam Amidon lost interest in his temperamental clients. He awaited a proposition.

It came to him in this form: Mother and Dad would sign a quit-

claim deed to the farm in favor of John. He would hold the property in informal trust for the whole family. We would take a mortgage, give the Old Man his \$2,000, and be rid of him.

The lawyer and the priest pleaded with Mother to do nothing of this kind. Why not? As soon impugn the Pope himself as suspect that Poor John would not do right by his brothers and sisters after his mother had gone.

Well, said the sage professional men, that was all right, but this was a thing people didn't do when in their right minds. Not since the case of King Lear versus Daughters. Bad business.

Mother insisted, and won.

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A Saturday in February, 1900, thawing snow, mud everywhere. Yesterday had been warm, buds bursting on the maple trees, a hint in the air that spring plowing must get under way.

The Old Man had collected three plowshares that needed sharpening. He had no money, so he had gone to the woods and loaded a cord and a quarter of four-foot sticks upon the wood-rack. He had hauled this heavy load as far as the spot where the public road joined the driveway. There he had left it overnight. It would take four horses to haul such a load over the muddy road to Wichita. But the plowshares would be needed as soon as the ground dried a little.

Early in the morning, the Old Man had a four-horse team harnessed and ready for the haul. The wagon was loaded, plowshares atop the wood, the whole pointed toward town.

A family council was proceeding in the house. Arrangements had been made for the signing of the papers that very day. Dad had not been told.

Margaret was unanimously elected emissary to deliver the news. She was a schoolteacher, and afraid of nobody.

Talk of a breakup had subsided of late, and the Old Man was getting ready to sow the early spring crops. He would not be expecting this.

The Old Man had halted his four-horse team in the east yard while he got a drink of water at the windmill pump. The morning

breeze was rising, and the crippled windmill wheel was pounding out its doleful monody. Bong-bong, whong-whong, long-long.

Big Flurry was picking up the reins now. The horses had begun to move.

Margaret rushed out the kitchen door and stood about twenty feet from Himself.

"Oh, just a minute, Dad!" she said, breathlessly.

"Whoa!" said the Old Man, and the horses stood still, sniffing the morning that was coming up out of the east.

"The folks want me to tell you that you can get that money if you'll stop at Sam Amidon's office in the Zimmerly Building this afternoon at three o'clock."

She rattled it off excitedly, throwing her head far back, as if she defied anybody to do a better job in the circumstances.

The Old Man took off his broad-brimmed hat, held it in his right hand by his side, handling the reins with his left.

"Hay?" he said.

"They just wanted me to tell you—wanted me to say that you can have that money you've been talking about. Today, at three o'clock in Sam Amidon's office. You know, you said you'd go away and never come back if Mother would get two thousand dollars for you."

"Hay? Slower now, Maggie, gaarl, and come closer to me. Steady, gaarl. What is it you say?"

"Well, that's all, only remember it's in the Zimmerly Building on Douglas avenue. Sam Amidon is Mother's lawyer. He has some papers to be signed. Three o'clock. Then you can get your money and go away."

The Old Man's eyes were giving him some trouble. He pulled the red bandana handkerchief out of the inside of his hat and wiped them roughly, as if trying to clear his vision.

Raising his head, he said, in a low voice, "A-a-a, Maggie gaarl, are you the little gaarl that I used to give all the new pennies to, I don't know?"

She did not answer, but grinned foolishly. What answer could you make to such a man?

"Come here to me, Maggie gaarl."

She stepped over to him. He bent and kissed her, saying, "God spare you, child."

He straightened up, put on his hat, and said, "I'll be there at three."

He held the reins taut.

"Get up, Prince! Perry! God damn your lazy bones, get on with it now!"

Behind his four horses he strode down the hill. His shoulders, I noticed, watching through the kitchen window, were somewhat bent of late.

He held his head high as he glanced over his shoulder toward the rising sun to catch the time of day. He did not look back.











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